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BELLA DONNA;

OR,

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME.

A Romance.

BY

GILBERT DYCE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LONDON:

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BELLA DONNA.

BOOK II.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER XIII.

A DEFIANCE.

MR. FRANKLYN has sweet sleep that night. The sigh of joy and relief he drew, as the welcome news was told to him, was deep and refreshing. He had often dreamt of this event, but never thought it possible. He forebore delving among those wretched papers. Something like hope was in store for him yet; clouds were clearing away a little—might wholly clear away, after all. Charlotte, the

calm, steady, sensible girl, might save the family. His dear Charlotte—his good, faithful, comforting child.

As a match, nothing could be better or more delightful. Sir Welbore, the father, was favourable. There was title, fortune, station. Everything was favourable. There was ecstatic joy through the house—the boisterous girls could have tumbled and thrown somersaults on the floor, to show their delight. And that dear, honest, broad-chested, good, open fellow, who was now recklessly distributing golden presents up and down the house—was there one whom we would have preferred before him? A darling!

It got about presently—was announced, as it were, officially. The county papers inserted their paragraphs with the usual intelligible hieroglyphics. Mr. Crowle, who had been away, came back one morning, had his cold hand taken affectionately in Mr. Franklyn's, and was told the glad tidings. He winced, but broke out presently into affluent smiles and paroxysms of delight, and congratulated heartily. Going away—for he would not

stay to dinner—he met the curate, Mr. Wells, posting up to the house, radiant.

‘Such good news,’ said the curate. ‘Did you hear, Mr. Crowle? Oh, I am so glad! Are you not?’

‘Oh, yes; charmed—delighted,’ said the other. ‘Such a pleasant piece of news—so agreeable for all parties.’

‘But how glad Miss Bell will be! She will hardly contain herself. You know she was so fond of Miss Charlotte.’

‘Ah, indeed!’ said Mr. Crowle. ‘I never knew that. By-the-way, we have not heard of Miss Jenny Bell lately. Nice person she was. Who *has* heard of her?’

‘I have. I hear from her constantly,’ said the curate, with a flush of pride. ‘I write to her regularly—she wishes to hear everything that goes on in this dear family, as she calls them.’

‘Oh! I see,’ said Mr. Crowle. ‘Quite so.’

‘And especially,’ the curate went on, eagerly, ‘about Miss Charlotte, her bosom friend. I think,’ said Mr. Wells, ‘I know nothing, or

have read nothing comparable to her affection for Miss Charlotte, who is now to be so happily married.'

'Ah! indeed,' said Mr. Crowle, showing all his teeth in one delighted smile. 'How curious! And so you keep up a correspondence with Miss Bell?'

'Oh, yes!' said the other; 'I must write by this very night's post to tell her the news. I am going to get all the particulars I can.'

'I see,' said Mr. Crowle. 'Very good; quite right. Ah! I see. I suspected it when Miss Jenny was here. Don't be angry; but I *did* see she was very much grieved to go.'

The curate's cheeks began to flush, but he was not displeased.

'Nonsense,' he said, 'Mr. Crowle. A poor curate must not think of such things. Oh, Mr. Crowle,' he added, growing suddenly confidential, 'what a pity it was; and such a charming, engaging creature. Her conduct was noble—noble! I never heard of anything like it.'

'Noble, certainly,' said Mr. Crowle; 'noble is exactly the word.'

‘Who in her position would have done the like?’

‘Who, indeed?’ said Mr. Crowle. ‘By-the-way, what is her address? Somewhere in London?’

The clergyman grew suspicious. ‘Her address?’ he said. ‘She is out somewhere as a governess.’

‘So I heard,’ said Mr. Crowle, still smiling. ‘I suppose they will tell me at the house?’

‘Oh, of course,’ said the curate, hastily; ‘Chesterfield Street, Mayfair.’

‘Thanks—thanks—thanks,’ said Mr. Crowle, very sweetly. ‘What trouble I must have given you. Not that I want to write to her. I should like to leave my card when in London. Good-bye, good-bye.’

And the young man of business went his way; and the road being lonely, began to smile and talk to himself, as was his indiscreet habit.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

‘Such joyful news,’ wrote the curate, that very evening, over his huckster’s shop, striving hard to gain the post. ‘Such joyful news, my dearest Miss Bell, as I have to communicate! I dare say you will guess already. Think of some one whom you love above all things; and every change in whose fortunes *must* be so dear to you. Not our common friend, dear Mr. Franklyn, but some one else. Think again. Ah, I see you know. Yes, my dear Miss Bell, it is all settled—was settled two days ago. Our dear Miss Charlotte is to be Mrs. Welbore Craven for the present; eventually Lady Craven. Splendid house, place, pictures, state, grandeur, and what not. Her

husband is all that is good. Every one loves him; I don't know how you would like him; he must have many virtues to please *you*. But he is to be her husband, and that is a character which, with you, will cover all imperfections. They are all out of themselves with joy. Between ourselves, my dear Miss Jenny, it is believed that this happy step will put an end to the little pressure which has so long hampered the movements of this dear family. It is considered the most brilliant match known in this county for long; and everybody says our bride is the happiest and most deserving of women. She bears her good fortune, I assure you, very well,' &c.

The Rev. Charlton Wells received no answer to his letter; but four days afterwards, Mr. Franklyn, sitting in his study, received a letter in Jenny's little writing, and marked 'private,' in letters as large as her little round fingers could form them. Mr. Franklyn read to this effect:—

.

‘Private.

‘Chesterfield Street.

‘DEAREST MR. FRANKLYN,

‘I have just heard of the joyful news of dearest Miss Franklyn’s marriage. How happy it must make you all! How happy it will make him; for though I have not seen him as yet, he *must* be good and brave and generous to have won her. You, too, dear sir, who have lived in the world and know men and women so well, will have read off all his virtues and good qualities!

‘How happy you must all be! I, dear sir, am getting accustomed to my new *place*. I even like it; for they are very good to me; but never do I expect to be so happy again as in dear Grey Forest. How my heart yearns to it! I have not been well of late, for the duty is severe; but am better now, thank Heaven. Once, indeed, I thought I could only live in the fresh breezes and green glades of darling old Grey Forest; but I had strength enough given me to get over that foolish notion.

Persons with the life I have before me, must learn to be independent of place, and even of affections. I remember, dear sir, your hinting this to me so kindly and delicately, just before I left ; and I cannot tell you how often that precious advice has comforted me, as I look to it in my diary. I repeat, dearest sir, I am now much better, and shall soon learn to smile at the notion of change of air, and such luxuries. I assure you, Chesterfield Street is considered a very good situation.

‘ Let me again congratulate you, and dearest Miss Franklyn. Let me thank you again and again for all your goodness, dearest Mr. Franklyn, to the little exile,

‘ JENNY BELL.’

At the desolate tone pervading this simple letter, Mr. Franklyn was greatly moved. He had well-nigh forgotten the little exile by this time ; for little exiles, from the fact of their exileship, easily drop out of the memory ; but it brought back to him her brave, noble—yes, it was noble—behaviour in the affair of the

marriage. We are apt to accept such things as of course ; but really for one in her lonely, unfriended position, when we come to think of it, it was a very unusual bit of self-denial. He was touched as he thought of it—there was even a pang of self-reproach. Failing health—the drudgery of a governess. He started—the very thing !

He would write himself to Mr. Maxwell. Her poor, pale cheek should be freshened by the breezes of ‘dear old Grey Forest.’ How attached she was to the place ! Longing, yearning for it—beating against the bars of her cage. Yes, he would write to Mr. Maxwell himself. Jenny’s letter was marked private ; so he would say not a word to the rest of the family. Besides, what a pleasant surprise for Charlotte—Jenny coming on a visit !

Before the week was out, Mr. Franklyn called in his daughter, with a smile on his face. ‘Charlotte dear, a moment ! I have such a surprise for you. Guess.’

It took a great deal to surprise the sensible girl. But she was very amiable, and feigned

a little excitement for the occasion. 'Do tell me, dear papa.'

'Do you know who is coming? Guess, I say.'

Charlotte thought, and shook her head. 'Some aunt?—some cousin?'

'There, Charlotte,' he said, putting 'Mr. Maxwell's letter into her hand; 'there—are you not glad? I knew you would.'

He passed again into his study; but over the placid features of the sensible girl something like a spasm of consternation flitted, and she mechanically put her hand to her side; but it was only for a moment—something like a smile of quiet defiance took its place.

Almost at the same instant our Jenny was at work in Chesterfield Street, up in her little room, exultingly turning over her little goods and properties. She was singing and she was dancing, and a more than usually brilliant flush was in her plump cheeks. Was not the prospect of getting down again to 'darling old Grey Forest' enough to set her wild? Her little Letts' Diary lay upon the table, and as

she looked at it *her* expression changed too—something like an electric challenge seemed to have passed between the two women. *She* is going down to meet her dear Charlotte once more! What issue shall there be for this second struggle?

CHAPTER XV.

JENNY RETURNS.

It is hard to conceive how the afflicted family in Chesterfield Street could have got on without our trusty Jenny. The mother, a wretched invalid, tottering over the edge of the Valley of the Shadow; the father, in the world and yet out of it, and in the matter of pounds and shillings, about as helpless as an infant; the lower members yet more disorganized; no head, no government; how was that domestic craft to be piloted?

Mr. Maxwell found great profit in her kind services; slowly and by degrees his sight mended. Jenny was so quick—so ready—so open to the merest shred of a hint; so capable of absorbing new matter and ideas,

that she really seemed to Mr. Maxwell to do the work more deftly than his own clerk. The precious auxiliaries of his sight having gone into hospital, as it were, were gradually getting back to health, from sheer repose ; Jenny, in her own delicate way, repressing firmly that idle longing of his to work them before they were yet strong enough to bear work. He was very grateful, and actually from habit began to like the joint labouring together by night. Suddenly arrived that letter from Mr. Franklyn, which struck him, as it were, all of a heap.

At first he did not remember who Franklyn was. Then he called down Jenny. Jenny was working some little petticoat edging or fringing, but she gave it up cheerfully, though it was not her legitimate hour for labour. She would work the whole day long gladly ; anything to be useful.

‘Miss Bell,’ said he, ‘here is a most extraordinary letter. I don’t understand it. Who are these people that want you?’

Jenny’s eyes opened with a gentle wonder

and speculation. She took the letter mechanically, and gave a low tempered ejaculation of delight, a suppressed start, for hers was a very well-regulated mind. 'Dear Mr. Franklyn,' she said, 'that darling family!'

'Then you know them?' said Mr. Maxwell, uneasily.

'Know them, sir!' said Jenny, again doing the eye movement; 'know them? Ah, sir! how kind of them; how good; how generous, to think in all their happiness of the little exile. So they used to call me.'

'But you will not go?' he said, still more uneasily; 'you will not leave me. You know you have got quite into the way of the thing—in fact, you are quite indispensable to me. What am I to do?'

Jenny was touched.

'Oh, sir,' she said; 'oh, sir!'

She was a little indistinct as to what she meant by this ejaculation, yet still it seemed to convey a good deal.

'You are very well,' said he; 'at least I hope so. Your health has not suffered; at

least, you will say so if it has; and I'm sure if salary——'

'Oh, sir!' said Jenny, with the gentlest inflection of reproach, 'do I complain—would I complain? I am sure I would work in my small way for *you*, sir, and the dear family,' she added, 'if I was sick, if I was weary, if I was breaking down, and was at the last gasp——'

'But you *are* not ill,' said he, looking on her round ruddy cheeks.

Jenny was speechless a moment; gave a deep sigh—then paused—and finally said softly—

'Ah, sir, I was reared, and brought up among the green fields, and the trees, and the brooks, the sweet smell of the hay, the fresh open country air. Is it unnatural that I should look back wistfully to those happy days? Is it unnatural that I should pine to meet again the friends of my childhood? Is it unnatural——'

Here Jenny paused; partly because she was not skilful enough to frame the same idea in a third different shape. Poor child, she was a

little confused, too, having never, so far as her friends knew, been reared among that sweet-smelling hay, or green fields. She had confounded her short residence at the Franklyns with the whole span of her youth, which, it is believed, was consumed in the unwholesome atmosphere of a crowded city.

Mr. Maxwell accepted the position mournfully. He saw how cruelly selfish it would be to detain her. The long confinement, too, must have been prejudicial to one reared on the sweet breath of the country. Ill, too, she might have been all this while; for those round blooming cheeks were often anything but certain evidence of robust health. 'Of course,' he said, at last with a sigh, 'you *must* go. It is quite right you should, and I was very thoughtless to dream for a moment of detaining you.'

'Go!' said Jenny, opening her wonderful eyes once more; 'go! go where?' she was amazed, confounded. 'Do you think,' she added, 'I would leave you in these straits, with dear Mrs. Maxwell so ill, and the dear

children with no one to look after them, and you, dear sir'—she stopped—'No, sir; you don't know me yet.'

It went on for some time that little dispute. Mr. Maxwell was firm. Jenny was also firm. She would not go; she would stay. If she was put upon her honour, of course she could not strictly say that she felt as strong as she *had* felt, but still she was very strong, *very* strong, and could do a deal of work. There was Stoodly and Masham,—that injunction, wasn't it? not half done; and Jenny smiled. No, she must stay and do her work.

But he was equally firm. Go she must. It flashed upon him that he had been all this time a little selfish and inconsiderate. If, indeed, she could come back early—that is, without inconvenience to herself—*she* knew what invaluable assistance she could afford him, &c.

But here was another difficulty. With reluctance and infinite delicacy, with grief of mind, too, feeling inexpressibly for him, it was at last wrung from her—coy, reluctant,

hesitating—that indeed, perhaps, it would be for the best that there should be a little *temporary* absence from the scene. Still, *that* was not it. She would gladly put up with all that and more, for the sake of the family, oh yes!

Mr. Maxwell, now thoroughly outside the committee room—miles away, in fact—could not comprehend. Jenny again hinted ever so delicately. She would not for the world bring discord into *that* family. But still she saw—she *knew*, she was unacceptable to——. Perhaps it was her fault—no doubt it was.

Mr. Maxwell, with counsel's instinct, leaped at once to what she was alluding. He shook his head sadly. 'We must make allowance for the sick,' he said; 'they are often unreasonable. A little patience.' Jenny was all protest in an instant. She would bear, oh yes; she could not say how much, all for the sake of that dear family. She had only mentioned it because of *their* sakes. Did she mind herself? Oh no, no, no, &c.

In short, it was debated with a spirit of much self-sacrifice on both sides. Jenny was

to go for her health's sake ; that health which was so much shattered, and needed restoration so sadly. She *had*, indeed, worked very hard, poor child.

In two days' time the little trunk was brought down, and once more packed to go back again to 'dear old Grey Forest.' Dear old Grey Forest, how the heart of the little exile yearned to it ! The place where she had been brought up, where as a child she had gambolled ! So fond was she of the place, it was natural that she should actually give way to this pleasant delusion. No one could well be angry with her for so affectionate a mistake.

It was curious, that going back again once more ; especially to one looking back and thinking of the time the little black trunk was packed. And she took care to put up, among her other little properties, that Letts' diary which she always took about with her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARTY AT GREY FOREST.

AT Grey Forest was a full house. The house-keeper had made an effort; the cook had made an effort; Mr. Franklyn himself had struggled to the surface of his papers, and taking breath for a few hours, had himself made a tremendous effort. But, in truth, the whole work fell upon the sensible girl—so calm, so business-like, so practical, so useful upon occasions of emergency like the present. She was Field-Marshal Domestic. Where there was strain and pressure—and there was strain and pressure in all manner of directions—she contrived to meet it. The legionaries had to be fresh drilled, new ones recruited, and abundant victualling had to be got in. The whole being what a metro-

politan legionary, brought down especially to organize the waiting 'service,' called 'a state visit,' required all elements to be on a 'state' footing—men, women, fittings, provisions, and adjuncts of all descriptions ; the whole of which task fell specially on the shoulders of the sensible girl, who did not allow all that was already on her own shoulders—so interesting and so important—to stand in the way a moment. All the house was in spirits. And here was Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet, and Lady Catherine Craven, wife of the above, with Sir Welbore's own intimate man and Lady Catherine's own woman *à secretis*, and a whole wain-load of luggage already established in the house. Already the professional lady, chartered specially to supervise the victualling, began to exhibit cheeks inflamed and angry from too prolonged contiguity to a raging furnace. The ordinary familiarity of professional intercourse was in her case found dangerous, and anything like reproof utterly fatal. She was not in fact to be addressed under the load of awful responsibility ; and

ordinary men and women shrunk away from her as from a cook more than mortal.

For the festival, too, had come (this gathering was not for the ceremonial between the Houses which was to take place up in London, but to pay honour to the illustrious family of Craven) other distinguished guests. There was staying in the house the new Bishop, who had been lately appointed to the See of Leighton-Buzzard, a person who has been before met at Mr. Franklyn's, an old friend of that family—Mr. Archdeacon Dilly, in short, who has just been measured for a mitre. That great Missionary Society, whose 'perfect organization, whether we look at it in its ready capacity for expansion, or for its equal susceptibility of a judicious contraction according to the exigencies of the moment, must be looked on as one of the most wonderful organizations of this wonderful nineteenth century,' *Charge of the Rev. James Wagthorne Bridges, D.D., Lord Bishop of Leighton-Buzzard, at his first Annual Visitation*, pp. 166-7—had borne fruit. In fact, it was no secret that it was the Foreign Missionary inte-

rest, with the silent yet powerful support of that well-known missionary nobleman, Lord Bury-shaft, who might be said to have never stirred out of the chair of a religious public meeting all his life, that gently propelled the Arch-deacon into the bishop's stall. Being, too, of the rough dragoons ecclesiastical, and, as it were, always in the saddle, scouring the country for Dissenters, he soon came under notice as an active trooper that deserved promotion. Being now in command, he was doubly active; and presently had driven the wretched Dissenters of Leighton-Buzzard to their holes and caves in the mountains. His corps, stirred on by such a leader, became about as notorious and favourably known to fame as Probyn's or Fane's Horse in India; and Leighton-Buzzard and the diocese surrounding became presently blazing far and near with the flames of religious conflagration. The old friend and newly-frocked bishop had been invited to do honour to Sir Welbore and Lady Mary Craven. So had another friend—young Wells, the curate, as elderly people

of the parish called him, and who had literally 'put in' piteously, and almost *in formâ pauperis* for the honour. He had nearly died of elation when the joyful news came to him, and he had to exchange his huckster's first floor for the solemn state of Grey Forest. Mr. Crowle also, though highly unsuitable as a guest in many senses, was bidden mainly at the instigation of the sensible girl, who had noted with misgiving the late change in his manner, and the strange defiant looks that at times shot from his eyes.

He accepted with a joyful eagerness that she could not comprehend; and with new clothes and gayer and more satin manners, became more like a glistening snake than ever. There was also in the house a generic guest or two—the generic young guest, lawyer or soldier ('Privatman,' say the German Kür lists); the generic middle-aged stout guest, who is good-humour and good-nature (with a firm belief in his own jocularly), walking about. Smith or Wilson will do as well as other names for these prevailing types.

Sir Welbore was a type in his way: so was

Lady Mary Craven. He was tall, puffed, and fluffed, stiff, and of a gentlemanly stoutness; more the fulness of port wine, than stoutness proper. He had a mild glow in his countenance of a tender pink—not the coarse exhibition of vulgar fat, but the more delicate *pâte tendre* from the Sèvres manufactory of nobility. He was always correctly and neatly dressed, and wore a pale blue neckerchief. He spoke in a solemn and sonorous voice, and always seemed to be striking his sentence on a domestic peal of bells hung somewhere within. His utterances were majestic and concerned his country's good—his country's corn—his country's politics; and, above all, his country's *Times*. He consulted that keeper of the nation's conscience far more frequently than any work in the world—not even excepting his banker's book and his family Bible.

Lady Mary Craven was stately, too, and of full majestic proportions. She was of good ripe quality.

But for rich and copious details of his magnificence we turn over the scarlet book of

glory, compiled by Ulster, and find the scroll of his titles there inscribed :

‘ CRAVEN.

‘ SIR WELBORE CHARLES HITCHINBROKE CRAVEN, 4th Baronet, of Craven-Weldington, Suffolk, *b.* 1796 ; *m.* Mary, 5th dau. of John, 6th Earl of Topplingstones ; and by her had issue :

‘ 1. CHARLES WELBORE, *b.* 1837.

‘ 2. GWEDOLINA-MATILDA, *b.* 1838.

‘ 3. PILASTER-GREGORY, *b.* 1839.

‘ CREST—A Cat ramp.

‘ MOTTO—*Je tiens mes ongles prêts.*’

They were now firmly established in the mansion of the Franklyns, and cast an air of terrible formality over the modest establishment. For the view that was obtained of them was always a state view ; and the speech that was obtained of them was always a state speech, delivered, as it were, from the throne ; and common mortals had to be more or less guarded in their choice of language, not

attempting any freedoms or pleasantries of diction, which would have been a gross outrage, and pronounced *lése-majesté*. The whole mass, the stately and unstatelily, the lay and episcopal, were now all fused together, and the various particles working in detrition against each other for some days past. With the young people it was pleasant enough, the social wheels moved on very smoothly. But with Mr. Franklyn it was sad up-hill work. Latterly he had got more or less out of the world. He knew not how to cast his thoughts and language in the mould fitted to great and stately people. The Cravens hung a good deal upon his hands.

He stood much in awe of Sir Welbore. At breakfast, when that embodiment of state came down, his first act was to secure the Leading Journal (newly arrived by post), with something that almost amounted to greediness. His prior claim being thus established, he addressed himself in a calm and leisurely fashion to his morning meal; and when that was finished took out his gold glass, fitted with

a thick black ribbon, fixed them on leisurely, spread out the huge amplitude of the Leading Journal, inhaled its fresh dampish flavour with a sort of relish, and began to read. This task helped him through the morning. He was seen moving about the house slowly, with his Leading Journal in his hand, spread out before him like a printed shield. He held slow conversations reclined back in his soft arm-chair, and looking over the edge of the Leading Journal. He even wrote his letters politely accommodating the Leading Journal with a chair close beside him. But he surveyed that Power warily all the while, and said to any casual spoliator rather snappishly, 'I beg your pardon, for one moment, I am not *quite* finished with the *Times* as yet.'

It must be mentioned that there was rather a hostile feeling engendered between this potentate and the Lord Bishop of Leighton-Buzzard, who had also a sort of tempered thirst for public intelligence, and for the columns of the leading journal—which, though Arian and heterodox in every sense, was still

reliable as a channel of sure and easy communication. The Lord Bishop, who was sharp and terse in manner and conduct, and who, if there had been no Dissenters on the mountains and moors of society, would have turned his fowling tendencies in another direction, rather resented this monopoly on the Baronet's part. So when the Leading Journal is on the chair beside the Baronet, who is at the writing-table, the Bishop enters gaily in his full hunting costume, very neat-limbed below, and says, gaily, 'Ha, ha! so here we have the *Times*. To-day's *Times*, I believe;' and tripping up softly, as though he had 'set' a Dissenter, and were anticipating a pleasant shot.

To him, Sir Welbore uneasily, and putting over his arm to guard his property: 'In one moment, my lord, just finishing my letter. Hem! Most interesting article on the magistrates. You shall have it when I have done.'

'My dear Sir Welbore,' answers the Bishop, 'don't hurry yourself, I shall skim it while you complete your voluminous correspondence;' and the Bishop makes a sort of right skirmish.

ing attempt to cut off the Leading Journal, taking an unhandsome advantage of both Sir Welbore's hands being engaged. Ruefully then, the Baronet, seeing he could not decently keep his ground, would throw down his pen, sacrifice his correspondence, and, with a dry smile, retire again into his soft arm-chair. 'I shall not detain you long,' he would say. '*Times* really most interesting to-day.'

CHAPTER XVII.

JENNY'S RECEPTION.

SUDDENLY, while this 'loose miscellany,' as one of our great but grotesque thinkers would put it, was working together, a little one-horse chaise, with a little shrinking black trunk, tied up with cord, placed beside the driver, was seen driving up the avenue to the distant crunching of wheels—a music which for those who live in country-houses is very welcome and exciting, and has a whole gamut of notes of its own. Nearly all were in their rooms dressing for dinner. Episcopus was donning his apron, in which he would descend glistening like a clerical snake. Baronettus de Welbore (so the pursuivants would call his style and title) was about getting into his evening



armour, the various pieces whereof—the coat of mail, the ankle-bits, and above all the rigid starched gorget, lay upon a chair ready. The curate, positively resplendent, was already in the drawing-room in a delirium of expectation. Fitfully, and off and on as it were, he had been dressing the whole day. And yet, save this poor faithful soul, there was not one in the house who looked forward to our Jenny's coming with delight. No one spoke of it, no one referred to it. It was not announced to bishop or baronet. The sensible girl never mentioned it—some way the younger girls had lost their old clinging fondness for their Jenny. It seemed a blue chamber for them, which they were not to look into. Mr. Franklyn was too absorbed to think of it. So here was cold and cheerless store of entertainment for our Jenny. Every one heard the crunching, and such, at least, as knew of her coming, started. And yet, Jenny was not down-hearted, though she had an instinct of what was waiting her; but her brave little spirit rose with the danger. She had pluck, courage, and what

not. She was smiling to herself all the way, as the little chaise took the bends and sweeps of the avenue. She was thinking of the happy days spent in Grey Forest; of her childhood's happy hours; her gambols in the grass years ago. (No; by the force of imagination we always *do* fall into that mistake, and take Jenny back ever so many years.) Perhaps she was thinking—dreaming of such matters. Who can tell? Here was the door; the porch in its ancient cloak of ivy. There was the old servant opening the door, whom our Jenny, jumping out, recognises with delight. She shakes hands with him; an *accolade* welcomed but drily by the retainer; and crossing the hall, coming from the housekeeper's room (she has not heard the wheels), is our dear, our darling Charlotte—friend of childhood, playmate, intimate, everything; at whom our Jenny flies like a bird, winds her in her arms, and covers with kisses. Forgiveness to the injured, &c.; and recollect how much Jenny had to forget. The sensible girl feels a sort of pang at this behaviour, so gracious and un-

expected. A feeling, too, compounded of embarrassment; for, very honest and straightforward, and in the habit of looking straight into other people's eyes, she knew in her heart that these were not the affectionate terms upon which they *could* be on for the future. She took, therefore, Jenny's endearments in a sort of undecided way, and asked her, would she like to see her room?

To them—all assembled for dinner, which some way acquired a sort of state imperial air from the presence of the Welbore Craven element, which insensibly awed every one present, and obliged them to comport themselves as at a royal banquet—entered modest Jenny—not full into the centre, but skirting round by the corners. Mr. Franklyn whispered Sir Welbore Craven, who now, with all his armour on, and properly tightened and burished, was on the rug for exhibition. He said, 'Ha! hum! I see; quite right and proper;' and then continued his synopsis of a 'remarkable article in the *Times* of this morning!'

Lady Mary Craven, who was sitting enthroned, as it were, sniffed the gale from afar, such as was wafted from the horizon to her, and did not seem to relish it. With her Jenny was 'a person,' or 'that person,' or 'the person I saw last night'—in the dictionaries an inoffensive word enough, but about which, in common use, hovers an unpleasant flavour. The curate would have fallen at her feet, and came up hot and awkward, and made Jenny awkward before a mixed company, by his spasmodic raptures. He was pouring out his welcome, when Jenny quietly smiled herself away from him, beaming on him; yet steadily retreating into the bosom of the girls, where she became absorbed. Yet she did not offend him, for there was a glance of mystery which seemed to say, 'There is a secret between us.'

Over on the ottoman sat young Craven and Charlotte. Jenny recognised him at once. She knew his quality.

'So that is he, Mr. Craven, dears,' she whispered loudy to the girls. 'How noble;

how grand ; how handsome ; how happy our dear Charlotte must be !'

The drawing-room at Grey Forest was not very large ; every one was pretty near to each other. Presently the procession was formed. They were marshalled two and two by the heralds according to their ranks, and moved on in order. Jenny and her curate walked together.

By the merest accident Jenny got placed next the royalty of the banquet, gorgeous in his armour. On the other side of him was Charlotte ; and beyond Charlotte, her knight and own true love. Baronettus tolerated his future relation very handsomely for one he knew so little of ; for every one that he knew little of, he looked on with suspicion. For a woman, if he *was* to find fault and be critical, he thought there was far too much independence. More reliance on the opinion of others, he thought, might have become her better ; which translated into Craven dialect, signified more obsequiousness to the voice of the King of the Welbores. Epis-

copus was opposite; he had the generic Smith on one side, Mr. Franklyn on the other; he was singing of the Dissenter to both. Baronettus looked down from over his mailed gorget on his future daughter-in-law. She was inclining her head to her true lover. He looked to his left, down upon Jenny, who at that second had been looking up to him with awe-struck, shrinking eyes, and had withdrawn them on being detected in the guilty act. He was not displeased; secret homage, even fear, was welcome. This was a proper young person—not forward, but mindful of her station. It did not, besides, become the house of Craven to be silent. There was no harm in encouraging the lower ranks. So he said, with a sort of husky magnificence, ‘Came far to-day, Miss—Miss—er—Odell?’

Jenny expressed much trepidation and alarm at this condescension, which was perceived with gratification by the illustrious speaker. With falling voice, ‘Jenny said she had come ‘very far, indeed, sir—from London.’

‘Ha, hum, quite proper,’ said he, to reassure

her. 'A vast city, London; the modern emporium of the world. I am not one of those who look upon our capital as outgrowing its vital energies—as absorbing too much from the extremities. No; centralization, under properly regulated conditions, I look on as good—more or less good.'

Jenny was eating a little fish at the time, had actually a small portion of sole in her mouth, yet so absorbed was she in the surpassing interest of these remarks, that she suspended further deglutition, and with eyes fixed on the Baronet in devout admiration, remained immovable while he developed his theory.

'You will say, how is this compatible—how is this consistent? The vital forces must be either in the tree or the branches—in the heart or the limbs. Come, now?—(Champagne, if you please.)'

Jenny took advantage of the moment, and by a hurried motion got her bit of fish down. She was then ready devoutly to receive more political economy.

'I recollect old Lord Ploughshare,' continued

he, wiping his mouth decently with a napkin, 'who sat a long time for our county—but that's a long story—was quite nonplussed when I put *that* view of mine to him. "It's a paradox," he said; "and yet there's common sense in it. How *do* you do it, Craven?" he said. He was right. To most ordinary people it would seem a paradox.'

Jenny lifted her eyes devoutly. 'Oh, how clever!' she said, softly. 'How wonderful! Oh, *so* clever!'

Sir Welbore smiled on her. 'If you studied these things, they would not seem so difficult to you.—(Hock, please.)'

'They would kill me,' said Jenny, with terror. 'It must have taken you years of study, sir.' And then conscious that this was not complimenting the Baronet's natural talents, she added again, as if in a reverie, 'Oh, *so* clever—how clever! How wonderful!'

Sir Welbore was much pleased with himself during that meal. He went to his mental desks and shelves and brought down some more little pet theories, about 'prices,' 'the

poor,' and other matters. Between the courses he introduced these subjects to Jenny with a good deal of majestic waving of hands.

'I do not show these views to every one,' he said, 'and indeed I must beg of you not to mention them. You understand. Some of these days, perhaps; but no matter—h'm——'

Poor Jenny! There was no serious danger of her betraying these weighty theories. What a patient listener she was—all, too, in a spirit of self-sacrifice—for the lecturer was stern and tyrannical, and exacted the most unflagging attention when he expounded his views! He fixed his eyes on Jenny when dealing with 'prices,' and, morally speaking, seemed to require that she was not to eat while *he* spoke. Jenny, though hungry with her ride, and who sometimes lamented the good healthy appetite which nature had furnished to her, took in 'prices' very sweetly instead of the dainties flitting by her.

'I cannot quite expect you to follow me,' said he, towards dessert; ('fine peaches, these,

really fine peaches), but still I make myself intelligible. I think so, at least.'

'Intelligible,' said Jenny, taking a peach that was offered to her, in the most noiseless way in the world; 'oh, it is wonderful! I always thought they were *dreadful* things. But now, somehow, I seem to get glimpses—little flashes of light, as it were, which——'

'Ah, h'm—quite so,' said he, complacently. 'They *do* give me credit for a certain lucidity in putting forward my views. Old Lord Ploughshare used to say, in his odd way, "Craven, there is no man who helps me to look through a milestone like you." It was his plain way of putting it. But he meant it as a compliment.'

'Ah, sir,' said Jenny, peeling her peach in a surreptitious way, as if she was merely curious as to *how* a peach was constructed, 'there is our dear Miss Franklyn, who is so shortly to be of your family, she can understand these subjects! How I envy her! What an opportunity for one of her tastes! She can learn so much and enrich her mind. She will have

time to hear these marvellous theories at leisure. I *do* envy her,' added Jenny, in a little rapture, under cover of which she managed to get a small segment of a peach, long prepared for the first convenient opportunity, into her mouth.

'She?—my daughter-in-law that is to be,' said he, with some constraint. 'Why, do you know that is the only point on which she has not *quite* come up to my views? Whether from a peculiar formation of mind, or perhaps from my imperfect manner of conveying myself, I can't say, but I was sorry to find a sort of indifference to these very important matters.'

The fact was, Sir Welbore, at the first opportunity, had tried to let off some of these political economy petards upon her, and she had said, with her natural truth and candour, 'Indeed, Sir Welbore, I can't follow you; we shall soon get into a regular fog.' Sir Welbore withdrew, hurt and a little confounded.

'Dear me,' said Jenny, opening her eyes; '*dear* me! and yet how she has studied, our dear Charlotte. She is *so* clever, sir; such a

mind—quite a man's head. My poor little brain beside hers indeed! She has read all the terrible books—Locke and Aaron Smith, and ——'

'H'm — beg your pardon — Adam—Adam Smith.' She had unwittingly trod upon one of his mental corns, and he winced, yet the stately correction was like a salve, so he was pleased at the same time. 'You mean the author of the "Wealth of Nations?"'

'Dear me, I am *so* stupid,' said Jenny. 'Oh, sir, forgive me.'

'But I had no idea,' said Sir Welbore, looking stiffly over at Charlotte, 'that my—that Charlotte was so deeply read in these matters. I think you misapprehend. She led me to believe that——'

'She is *so* clever,' said Jenny, in her devout way. 'Look at her library. She has rows of those wonderful books, all marked and noted in pencil. She has wonderful genius and talent and cleverness, dear Charlotte, more than many men, sir, I assure you.'

Sir Welbore looked distrustfully over at

Charlotte, now very busy with her true knight. He rather resented all the new theories of 'women's work,' female law copying, and such like ; but in Charlotte's instance he considered himself a little aggrieved, as though some deception had been put upon him.

Before the night was over he spoke in very flattering terms of the young person who had sat beside him at dinner. 'A most suitable person,' he said to Mr. Franklyn, though for what suitable he did not mention. And Mr. Franklyn taking up the text, went more fully into the history of Jenny's list of self-sacrifices, which Sir Welbore considered 'very proper conduct indeed—does her great credit.'

Jenny, whose eyes were always busy travelling round the table in a downcast, imploring way, at one time surprised the faces of the lovers turned directly towards her. Their faces were as promptly turned away, as it were, on being discovered. 'Ah !' thought Jenny, 'they are talking of me—poor me.' They were talking of her. Young Craven was asking about her, as he had asked about any new faces at

the table. He said he disliked her face more than he could say. There was something to him most disagreeable—something *stealthy*, which he could not endure. Perhaps he did the poor creature injustice. And so she was the one who was near being in *their* family ('*our*' family, said young Craven, with meaning, and the sensible girl gave a tranquil blush), and who had made such a grand sacrifice? Well it might be so, but still (and young Craven looked hard at Jenny) he did not like her—a dangerous creature, depend upon it.

Jenny caught this expression of dislike, and dropped her eyes at once in a shrinking, deprecating way. 'Our dear Charlotte,' she said to herself, 'is telling him about poor me. It is very odd how our dear Charlotte dislikes me. No matter—no matter.'

Later that evening, when all were in the drawing-room, Mr. Franklyn went over to Jenny, who was sitting modestly apart, looking over some of the dear old music. (What chords were touched at every incident of that

night—the old house at home, the familiar furniture, &c.) Jenny said many times, to many different persons, that she felt as it were in a dream. Mr. Franklyn came over to her, and to him she said it was *exactly* like a dream. The old place, the old chair, the old faces, &c.

And Mr. Franklyn, who had been just speaking of her to Sir Welbore, was really pleased with her grateful nature, and spoke very kindly to her of her prospects and life, and of how she was getting on at the Maxwells'.

Presently came up young Craven. 'We are looking for a music book,' he said. 'Charlotte is going to favour the company. It should be here on this chair. Could I disturb you a moment, Miss—Bell? Thank you.'

Jenny had glided off her chair in a second—had shrunk away with a sweetly resigned look and drooping eyes. Young Craven spoke in a blunt way. He stooped down and looked on the ground. 'Very sorry, indeed,' he said, 'but this book *must* be here.'

'By the way, Welbore,' said Mr. Franklyn,

‘I believe you have not been introduced to Miss——’

Young Craven, busy tumbling the books over, looked up a little surly from his work.

‘No,’ he said, bluntly; ‘these forms are scarcely necessary here. Everyone knows everybody in this house.’

Jenny, scarcely daring to lift her eyes to him: ‘I seem to know you many years—so many years! I have heard of you so much—it seems like an old friend.’

Young Craven gave something like a laugh, and said again, ‘Beg your pardon! This is not the book yet; sorry to disturb you, but Charlotte is waiting.’

Jenny fetched a gentle sigh, then said, ‘I could help you, I’m sure; I know every song in these dear old books. Dearest Charlotte and I used to——’

‘Got it at last, for a wonder,’ said young Craven, bounding, and leaving Jenny and her sentence abruptly.

‘Used to play them over and over again,’ continued Jenny, adroitly, as though she had

been relating the little incident to Mr. Franklyn. 'Ah, dear me! how the old days come back upon me!'

Jenny's heart was sorely wrung by this behaviour of her friend's betrothed. He dislikes me, she thought. Some friend has been setting him against me. But she made a resolution of propitiating him by gentleness, and opposing to his prejudice a steady and unvarying sweetness. Later that night, Mr. Franklyn, who was determined to pay her all fitting attention, called to young Craven, 'Will you get Miss Bell some wine and water?' Young Craven did as he was bid, ungraciously enough—that is to say, as promptly as the office could with decency be got through. He had to wait by her until she had finished. Jenny sipped her wine leisurely, and pitching her voice in her lowest key, kept him prisoner by a series of little questions, chiefly concerning 'dearest Charlotte.' She was so even, so equable, so steady, so calm, and so sweet; that was the only term—insipid and vapid as it was—that *would* express Charlotte. He would be very

happy—oh, so happy—winning *such* a treasure. He might trust *her*. She knew Charlotte well. And Jenny sipped her wine leisurely, and looked radiant, as she dwelt on her friend's merits.

But it would not do. That dull, insensible young Craven drummed with his fingers on the table, and spoke a few formularies of conventional assent, all the while looking first over at one quarter, and then measuring Jenny's tumbler with distrustful impatient eyes.

'You live down at Craven,' Jenny said, looking earnestly at her tumbler, as though she were looking for marine objects. 'I hear it is lovely—*lovely*!' (Where had Jenny picked up this assurance?) 'Not one of your new places, but venerable. *I* shall never see it, but dearest Charlotte will. Describe it all to me—do,' continued Jenny, suppliantly, 'if not too much trouble. Give me a little sketch of it—Charlotte's future home. You can photograph well—well, I am sure. I *know* you can.'

Young Craven lifted his eyes from Jenny's

tumbler and laughed loudly, almost rudely. 'A good notion,' he said; 'beastly process—stain your fingers. Catch me at that sort of work. No, no!'

'I mean,' said Jenny, with a little tremor, 'description—verbal description, which I am sure—that is, I know, you can do it in the most life-like, graphic way possible. To-day at dinner, though I was a long way off, I heard, that is——'

'There's my father going to bed. Beg pardon, but must go now. More wine? Excuse me,' and young Craven shot away, abruptly leaving Jenny standing, and in the midst of her little narrative. She smiled after him and sighed. I daresay she set him down as ever so little boorish; but he was of the country. He was, besides, Charlotte's *futur*.

No doubt she thought, too, within herself, 'How he dislikes me! What have I done—the little exile who wishes well to all men and women, and is too humble not to be on sweet terms with mankind?' Perhaps some one had set him against her. 'But really,' thought

Jenny, or must have thought Jenny, 'it amounts to a marked, pointed dislike.' Still good-humour, sweetness, gentleness, would do much to remove this prejudice, and these arms only was one in her lonely position entitled to employ.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LITTLE EXILE'S 'GAME.'

JENNY had a certain pride of her own. She had made these little advances for the sake of her old friend and playmate of early years ; but she felt it would be unwomanly to do more. Young Craven was late the next morning at breakfast—rather had been out ranging the hills—and by a curious accident, the only gap or vacancy at table was to be found next Jenny. He drew in his chair with a sort of impatience, and a wry look, but half concealed. The Bishop was next him on the other side ; and though he disliked that prelate, and ‘chaffed’ him secretly, and even in a sly manner to his face, he turned towards him and

became eagerly interested in the Dissenters and the 'wonderful organization' of the great missionary society.

But the Bishop, who was always chary of his ammunition, and kept his conversational theories 'in store,' as it were, not to be wasted on mere camp-followers and volunteers, did not enter eagerly on his favourite subjects. He was busy, too, with muffins, which he was cutting down fiercely, crosswise, as he would, morally speaking, and with the blade of controversy, a toasted Dissenter.

But Jenny did not seize the opportunity, as he had imagined. He was determined to be churlish if she should dare to address him—to 'shut her up' curtly. It would be a useful hint for her future demeanour. But, strange to say, Jenny seemed to shrink away from him with a sort of a hint of a cowering glance. Once, indeed, she ventured to speak with him—to ask him if he would be so kind as to—to—to hand her the——

'Beg pardon. What?' he said.

'The cream—er; no, I mean the butter,'

said Jenny, in great confusion, and looking as though she expected to receive a blow.

Young Craven saw this, and laughed inwardly. He was pleased at having this awe-inspiring power. 'She won't come teasing me again,' he thought. 'She will keep in her proper place.'

'Why did you ask that curious thing down,' he said to Charlotte, 'when I was here, at least? Something coarse about her. I can't get on with her at all.'

'It was papa wished to have her here,' said the sensible girl, 'he pities her condition so.'

'I can't bear her manner,' he went on, 'it is so—so—creeping. And yet, she has good looks of her own. She would make a good flashy lady's-maid.'

Jenny, with natural delicacy, took the rough hints given to her, and kept in retirement. Sir Welbore patronized her, and at his feet she drank in the waters of wisdom and the Welborian political economy. But young Craven she avoided, but not conspicuously. Mr. Franklyn, at dinner, one day, was about

bidding young Craven 'take in' Miss Bell; but Jenny with a hurried start caught him just in time, and said in a whisper, 'Oh! no—no—no!' She was sitting next Mr. Franklyn afterwards, and she told him softly, that he must have thought her 'so odd.' But she—that is, persons in her dependent position were so unfortunate—sometimes they inspired dislikes, repulsions—perhaps well deserved—in *her* case she knew it *was* so; but the fact was, young Mr. Craven had taken a *dreadful* dislike to her—in fact, hated her. This was all in confidence—not a word to be breathed—as he, Mr. Franklyn, was her friend and benefactor. But, on the whole, she was most unfortunate—most unhappy—most miserable; and Jenny seemed that she could then and there have cried heartily, but for the publicity.

Mr. Franklyn was confused, and puzzled, and grieved. He really liked Jenny—all elderly gentlemen liked Jenny)—and he thought of speaking to young Craven. However, he told what Jenny had told him to one of the younger girls, and said he feared poor

Jenny was very uncomfortable; and that it was a pity; and that here was her little time of pleasure all turned into bitterness. She was in a very helpless, dependent position, and it was very unfortunate, on the whole.

The younger girls were a little touched at this picture—grew suddenly very kind and tender to her—and even told young Craven, and said it was a shame for him. He laughed, but laughed complacently—he inspired such dreadful terror by the awful majesty of his demeanour. He was pleased at the notion. 'What nonsense,' he said. What did he care about the girl, only he did not want to be persecuted.

Jenny certainly was not persecuting him. That very day he spoke to her good-naturedly, but with patronage; but she, receiving it gratefully, and almost abjectly, still continued shy. She told the girls, who told him again, that somehow she always felt a tremor when Mr. Craven came into the room. It was the most absurd, ridiculous thing in the world, and she could laugh at herself. But her nerves

were shaken, and latterly she had gone through a good deal of trial. And the girls, though boisterous naturally, suddenly recollected their brother's foolish adventure, and became grave and full of pity. Then there came universal kissing, and Jenny's plump cheeks had to bear many of these tokens of affection.

Full of tenderness they tell all to young Craven. 'Now, Charles,' they say, 'you *must* try and be good-natured to her—poor thing. You know her dependent situation,' &c. 'Good gracious,' Charles bursts out; 'what have I done to her? Why, if anything, *she* stands off from me. She shrinks away as if I was going to eat her. I am not this rough sort of ogre that murders young women for breakfast, am I? Someway she—I don't know what to call it—slides off, when I even say good-morning to her.'

'Ah, that's it,' says the younger girl, 'she's afraid. She says there's something in your face so like the old Roman busts—of Plato, I think—so cold and chilling. I don't see it, but *she* does.'

'Gammon—nonsense,' said he, laughing loud; 'what a little humbug she is!' But humbug or no, he was pleased. Hitherto he had always been complimented on his rude physical gifts—his shooting, hunting, and the mere savage accomplishments. But he thirsted for praise for gifts which he had not—the more intellectual line—in which, to say the truth, he was sadly deficient. This 'humbug,' then, came welcome.

They were going out to walk—the two girls and Charles. Charlotte was to take a state airing in the carriage with her new mamma, an office which, it is to be suspected, she would not have selected, but which, being part of her duty, she accepted with cheerfulness. Jenny was helping her in some little balancing of accounts, a department in which she was always useful. On the walk, the girls, who, like all young people, were subject to silent turns and revulsions of feeling, entertained their companion with the whole story of their brother's and Jenny's little affair, with all minute details; giving all the dramatic busi-

ness and colouring. They took the tale out of each other's mouth as they went along, and grew quite sympathetic over the incidents of the going away and the return. He had heard a meagre outline before—had picked up allusions and scraps at the family-table, but had never received it in this epic shape. He was rather interested—put some questions, and said, at the end, it was very interesting—like a story, by Jove! Then they told him, with laughter, of her lover—of the curate, Wells—and the poor man's suffering, and how they were longing to make a match of it, and 'what fun' it would be. They were all plotting, they said, to bring it about; and papa would get the Bishop to do something for him, and they would make a very pleasant pair. Young Craven said it would be good fun for them all to join and make the fellow speak out.

That evening he came up several times to Jenny, with as much graciousness as he could put on, asked her how she spent the day, and in the hope of avoiding the terrible Roman

bust expression, tried to expand his honest face into an almost imbecile cast of meaning. Jenny expressed (by looks) the most intense gratitude—it was too great kindness for such as her, the little exile—human kindness always affected her—she didn't expect——. But in speech she kept reserved, and in a second shot away over to the 'dear girls,' leaving young Craven a little amazed and a little provoked. 'What airs this creature is giving herself!' he said to himself. 'Really, when one takes the trouble to conciliate——' He thought of the Roman bust expression again, and smiled. 'What *could* she be afraid of?'

It will be seen how curiously things had come about in our Jenny's favour. Though not of the society, and odious, as she conceived, to one member, still she had come to be part of the dramatic elements of the scene, and was actually food for the thoughts and speech of many of the actors. It was something for a poor outcast to reach even to this in such a company.

It has been mentioned, that young Craven's

weakness—rather one of his weaknesses—lay in struggling out of his own special accomplishments, where he shone, into every other walk, where there was no probability of his shining. He was a noble savage—could read, that is to say, for ten minutes, but then got tired; and could write short, plain letters in an indifferent hand. But he pined to be thought clever, and actually wrote verses in secret. Like most of your rough, strong, country fellows, he was more or less ‘soft,’ and had a sentimental corner, to which he often retired. He actually wrote verses—tender, languishing, feeble stanzas, which appeared in an honoured place in the *Dorkingshire Conservative* (Sir Welbore’s politics), with the initials, C. W. C. It was whispered about whose property these letters were; indeed, young Craven told the secret, with mystery, to every person who furnished a suitable opening for bringing in the subject. He had a half-dozen or so of these outpourings written to ‘Ianthé,’ to ‘Juanita,’ to ‘Elvira,’ to ‘Zitella,’ and to other romantic beings, whose

names he had heard in plays, or seen in the music-books.

One morning, when the post-bag came in at breakfast-time, and Sir Welbore was turning over his letters, with a sort of over tasked Cabinet Minister air, he handed over two newspapers to his son. They were two copies of the *Dorkingshire Conservative*; and it was noted, that the youth opened them with a sort of bashful, foolish air uncommon with him, and at the same time with great flutter and eagerness. It came out after breakfast. It was the longest effort his genius had yet soared to. It was a poem 'To MEDORA,' which, bursting the modest limits of the 'Poets' Corner' of that journal, had spread like an inundation down three quarters of a column. It was in blank verse (the feet very imperfectly calculated), and was signed with the familiar letters, 'C. W. C.' He was bursting to show his labour, and got the three girls together in the garden summer-house to listen while he read. The two younger, sadly untrained, listened, wondering. They would

have laughed, but young Craven was serious—too serious. It began—

‘Medora! loveliest flower, where’er thou art!
Sweetest!—who dwells,’ &c.

He read it twice through, and then collected the voices. The younger ones said it was fine—very fine—as they conscientiously supposed it must be. The sensible girl said it was very fair—very good, indeed.

‘But don’t you like it—isn’t it the best thing I have done? Come!’

‘The best thing you have done?’

‘Yes—it is far better than the “Ianthé”—isn’t it?’

‘Well,’ said the sensible girl, smiling ‘as you *do* put it to me, I like the little short pieces better. I think blank verse is scarcely your line. You may call me Miss Candour if you like.’

‘Well, I must say,’ said the youth, bridleing a little, ‘I can’t see how you get at that. I know the editor said I had made “a gigantic stride”—those were his very words.’



'My dear Charles,' says the sensible girl, laughing, 'exactly. No one can make a more gigantic stride than you on *terra firma*. Keep to it, my dear Charles. This blank verse-making never answers, even in the most skilful hands. Gigantic strides! What a funny editor—ha! ha! Not but that is *very* good—wonderful for you—it really is very good,' added the sensible girl, hastily.

Young Craven was colouring pretty hard. He took back his paper, and crushed it up to put it in his pocket.

'I was sure *you* would have liked it,' he said, with deeply wounded tone—'for Medora was partly taken from——'

'Oh, how nice—how kind of you!' said the sensible girl warmly. Though she was one of the truthful, candid people, she was more conscious than they are, of the ungraciousness of speaking the plain truth—only she knew not *how* to take off the unpleasantness. She would have been grateful to be shown the way. But his withers had been sorely wrung. Yet all would have healed in an hour; but just at that

moment Jenny is seen passing by among the trees, pensively pulling flowers.

‘I think you will allow the editor to be a man of judgment. It is one of the best-conducted papers in England. He is considered, I know—— Hallo! there is Miss Jenny. I wonder is she a judge of poetry. By Jove! I should like to ——’

The girls, too young to know the significance of what they were about to do, started up and cried, ‘Oh, read it for Jenny—read it for Jenny;’ and without a second’s delay called out, ‘Jenny, Jenny.’

Jenny stopped, in the act of pulling a flower, amazed—affrighted. The colour rose slowly in Charlotte’s cheeks. Jenny looked round—hesitated—then moved swiftly away. The two girls started off in pursuit. ‘She *must* hear Charles’s poem,’ they said.

Charlotte looked as though she suffered, but she was too proud to say a word. The youth was thinking complacently of the pleasure of reading it a third time aloud, and said nothing. Jenny was presently brought in, struggling

almost, and in custody. She was almost scared.

'You foolish children,' she said, 'what did you do this for? Mr. Craven here, and dear Charlotte—oh!'

'You must hear it, Jenny,' said the girls. 'Oh, such a beautiful poem as Charles has written!'

Jenny's face lighted up as with a flash.

'A poem,' she said, with enthusiasm, as though the news were too good to be true. 'A poem—Mr. Craven's!'

'Written all by himself,' said the girls together. 'You wouldn't believe it.'

This, though a little uncomplimentary, was still genuine praise. Jenny shook her head sadly. *She* knew the marvellous power latent, perhaps undeveloped, behind the *os frontis* of the Roman bust; she could believe much. Young Craven looked bashful, and fingered his newspaper. He was burning to begin.

'It is only some ridiculous rhymes,' he said. 'I am ashamed of them, and you must promise

me not to laugh. Charlotte here says they are very bad. I daresay she's right.'

Jenny gave a start.

'Very bad!' she said; then checked herself. 'Oh, Charlotte is a great judge; she is so clever; has read such a deal. Haven't you, Charlotte, dear?'

Charlotte still suffering, answered coldly—

'I said they were very good—very excellent, indeed. I am no judge, as you know only . . .'

'Oh,' said Jenny, in a lowly way, 'if it would not be too much trouble, *would* you—that is, if you *would* be so kind—just to read—just a little a few lines.'

Then, after many 'It's really not worth,' 'Pon my word, it's the greatest stuff you even' &c., the youth began—

'TO MEDORA.

'Medora! loveliest flower! where'er thou art,
Sweetest!' &c.

Who shall describe Jenny's delight—real, unaffected delight—during the recital of this



performance? Her sympathetic countenance expressed all the hopes and passions of the poet. She marked the time, as it were, by little gasps and spasms of intense enjoyment. She looked from one of the girls' faces to the other in speechless rapture. Young Craven felt this encouragement, and pursued his task with fresh fire. He got to the end with immense spirit—was proud of himself. Charlotte looked at Jenny's honest enthusiasm with a curling lip and strange disgust. She was naturally of the 'lymphatic' temperament, and was not easily stirred. She said nothing.

'You like it?' said young Craven, folding up his paper.

'Oh—oh—oh!' said Jenny three times, half closing her eyes, 'charming, charming!' Her eyes fell on Charlotte's look of scorn. 'That is—I'm not a regular judge. But I *like* it—oh, I do *so* like it! It is all I can say.'

'Well, that is very high praise. It is fair, I think, for a beginner. I assure you, a very experienced literary man' (Ed. of *Dorkingshire Conservative*), spoke very highly of it. Of

course, he might be prejudiced. Charlotte doesn't like it—no, Charlotte austerey condemns.'

Jenny heard this statement with amazement. Charlotte, too proud, still said nothing. Her sister spoke for her.

'Indeed, Charles, she liked it. Charlotte never says what she feels.'

They at last had an instinct that something was wrong. But their youthful minds did not see that this attempt at justification was suggesting to him that there was something to be justified, and only magnifying a trifle.

'Not like it!' said Jenny, grieved, as it were. 'Not like it! Oh, I know nothing of the rules,' she went on, smiling. 'I am one of the vulgar crowd, and it pleases me. But Charlotte is so clever, and has learnt all the rules.'

Charlotte looked at her, scared, as it were. She had instinct of what Jenny was about, but seemed to be afraid to think it possible. Young Craven, now in good humour again, had rolled up his precious paper.

'Never mind,' he said, 'it is not worth talking about. I am a wretched rhymers, and shan't take to it as a profession, I assure you. Don't be afraid, Charlotte, I shan't discredit our establishment.'

'Still,' said Jenny, with hesitation, 'it is so nice, so charming to *be able* to turn a few lines elegantly, if you wish. Oh, I would give, give worlds!' added she, clasping her hands, 'in the 'lonely solitude of my little room, to be able to do so. How I envy those who have the gift to do so! Don't you, dearest Charlotte?'

Charlotte, still scared, said it was very pleasant—that is—

'Ah,' said young Craven, 'nothing under Milton for Charlotte—the best sort or none. Come now, let us get in to lunch. A race, girls—fifty yards' start for you.' And the three shot away.

The two women, left suddenly behind at the door of the summer-house, looked suddenly in each other's face. Our Jenny's cheeks had a fine fresh colour, and her fine eyes sparkled; the other was pale.

‘I am not going in to lunch, dear,’ said Jenny. ‘I must get some more flowers. You will go, of course, and join that happy circle. Dear me, what a happy lot before you! You remember, in the “Speaker,” at school, “Happy, happy, happy pair. None but the brave,” &c. He *is* brave. By the way, you won’t be angry, darling, if I give you one *little* bit of advice. You *know* I mean well; but it *just* occurred to me. May I?’

Charlotte, with her eyes still fixed on her, said abruptly, ‘What have you to tell me?’

‘You should praise his poetry—in fact, everything he does. Men expect it. *I* was genuine, because I really *did* like it. Oh! they were lovely, beautiful verses. It really surprises me,’ added Jenny, musingly, ‘*how* you did not like them. Quite right, though, to tell the truth.’

There was a strange air of independence in the way Jenny spoke, together with a tone of mocking good-humour quite unusual with her. The other remarked it, and seemed confounded.

‘I must go in,’ she said, slowly.

'Ah! yes,' said Jenny, 'I am detaining you. Good-bye, darling. You are not angry? People in *my* situation are always privileged. Do you know,' added Jenny, in a half-whisper, 'I think him charming—so gay, so natural. Oh! you *will be so happy!*'

And with a little pert toss of her head, Jenny moved away, singing. The other, as it were dreaming, looked after her long; then suddenly seemed to wake up. A quiet, resolved expression came into her, with one of her old calm smiles. She walked away thoughtfully, but with a firm step. At the end of the walk she looked back an instant at Jenny, who was stooping, pulling flowers. A little, light waggoner's straw hat decorated Jenny's head. No doubt she was singing at her task. A strange look of quiet scorn came into Charlotte's face; it was half defiance. She had picked up Jenny's glove. It was open battle, with pointed spears. No quarter.

But they were not done with the luckless address 'To Medora,' as yet. Two days afterwards a stupid housemaid, in distress for

fuel, found the *Dorkingshire Conservative* drifting about as part of the flotsam and jetsam of the drawing-room. It had served its turn—local journals were not considered precious—and she did not know of the splendid treasure it contained. Accordingly, ‘Medora’ was resolved into wreaths of curling smoke, and floated gently up the dining-room chimney. Before long the youth had missed his treasure, and there was terrible hue-and-cry through the house. It could not be found; and housemaid knew not, or declined to disclose, what she had done. The youth grew moody. The loss might be irretrievable, for local journals are not kept in stock. Suddenly he remembered there were two copies. What had become of the second *Conservative*? Fresh hue-and-cry. Up-stairs, down-stairs, and even in my lady’s chamber; when, lo, the youth’s own hand delves out from among the music in the drawing-room the lost journal. We are saved: there is great joy. But in the very heart of the *Conservative* is a long narrow gap, like the embrasure of a tower, clearly



done with a pair of scissors. The precious rhymes 'To Medora' had been feloniously cut out!

The family were out, scattered about. The youth, in a great fume, inquired of servants—of everybody—but was not displeased. Jenny was in her room, in retreat, working or braiding flowers for the waggoner's straw hat, or, it might be, praying. A maid came to tell her of the outrage, and presently Jenny entered into the drawing-room where the youth was looking vacantly through the window in his newspaper. Jenny penitent—morally speaking, with her hair dishevelled and the white sheet of Jane Shore on—she would have fallen at the youth's feet. She had been very wrong. She had no right to do so—none in the world. But where there were *two* copies she thought—no harm—*indeed*, meant no harm. In fact, she alone was guilty, and there—*there* (in trembling fingers) was the poem, cut out from the *Conservative's* bosom with Jenny's own little scissors—there—there.

Young Craven raised her (morally speaking), and, really flattered by this genuine unaffected homage to his work, glowed all over as he conveyed his acknowledgments. Harm! there was none in the world. He felt it really as a great compliment that she should appreciate his little verses. 'Some of these days,' continued young Craven, with an air of wise thought, 'I mean to collect my little trifles into a small volume. Some literary people of judgment' (*i.e.* Ed. of *Dork. Cons.*) 'have strongly advised me to this step. You shall certainly have an early copy, that is, if you will honour me by giving it a place among your books.'

Jenny, overwhelmed by this favour, faltered out her acknowledgments. Wheels were heard on the gravel outside.

'Here they are,' she said hurriedly, 'I must go. I have letters to write;' and she fluttered away to her room again.

Why *must* she go? He was confused and pleased. 'What an enthusiast she is!' he said half aloud; 'and yet I like these natural characters; something Italian—something Spanish

about her.' Then he thought of Charlotte, who had *not* privily cut them out to paste in her album, and ceased to smile.

At dinner [that day the sensible girl, who had become of a sudden much more earnest in her attentions to him, and almost forced in her manner (which did not suit her), said suddenly, 'Well, Charles; no news of the verses. They have ransacked the house from top to bottom.'

'Oh, they were found,' he said, carelessly.

'Found,' she said, lighting up; 'I am so glad! And where?'

'Oh, in the drawing-room, I believe, among the music.' He looked over furtively at Jenny, who was looking over furtively too, but dropped her eyelids the next second. Charlotte saw it—not only saw, but understood the whole incident, as though it had been told her on the spot. There was a secret, or at least a tacit understanding, between them. The sensible girl turned pale again. Jenny was scoring rapidly.

CHAPTER XIX.

JENNY'S MORNING.

THOUGH somewhat distracted by his company, Jenny noticed that Mr. Franklyn used to retire, as of old, to his study,—going down the mine, as it were, very late of nights, to shovel among his papers. He was getting the old, anxious look back again—sadly worn about the cheeks—for business had been drawing in closer about him. Sir Welbore had announced to him one morning, in stately way (as from the ministerial benches):—‘Mr. Franklyn, I have heard from Mr. Hodge—my solicitor, Mr. Hodge. He expects to be here on Thursday next. Hum—and so—hum—I dare say you will find it convenient to have everything ready for him.’ Mr. Franklyn

said yes; he hoped so—in fact, he was quite sure so—and would send for Mr. Crowle at once. Jenny was by, in a corner, working embroidery—cutting out—with such a general mouse-like demeanour, that they virtually considered her absent. She was too lowly to listen.

Jenny, however, knew that this referred to darling Charlotte's fortune, which Mr. Franklyn was to find. For the great house of Craven, though abounding in wealth, considered it only due to its magnificence to have a proportionate sum laid at its door, by the family who was shortly to be allied to it. It would not do to have it go forth that a mere pauper was coming into the House, 'in her smock,' as our coarse old ancestors would put it. And so stately Sir Welbore, rising in his place on the Treasury benches, said, 'Mr. Franklyn, we shall say seven thousand pounds, if you please.' And Mr. Franklyn said, With all his heart; that is, with all his heavy heart.

It was laid on the back of his young man of business, Mr. Crowle; and for some weeks it

was believed that he had been striving in the market to get together this sum on the security of the estate, which seemed doubtful enough, for it was pasted over and over again with layers of mortgages, like an old dead wall. He went out every day, like a shipwrecked mariner on an island, ascending the rock, and came back with dismal accounts. Still there was hope. But now—the evening before Sir Welbore made his financial statement from the Treasury bench, he had written from London to say there was hope—more in his next. Which news produced a little exultation and fluttering hope ; for it was likely that the dead wall would bear another mortgage poster.

That morning, with the general Grey Forest postal delivery, came a letter for Jenny, from Mr. Maxwell, the first she had received. In the quiet retirement of her own chamber she read it. It ran :—

'Chesterfield Street.

'DEAR MISS BELL,

'I hope your health is now quite restored, and that the air of Grey Forest has done you good. I am afraid I am more selfish in this wish than you imagine. You are wanted back here sadly ; and, I must tell you the plain truth, we cannot get on without you. The house is in disorder ; the poor children can do nothing, and their mother, who, I am sorry to say, did not know who was her secret and unseen friend, now begins to miss many of those little cares and attentions which we cannot supply to her. For myself, I am getting helpless again—eyes showing signs of revolt—in short, I want my faithful secretary again.

'This is the very effrontery of selfishness ; but what can I do ? Still you must not think of stirring, unless you are quite—*more* than restored. Only please mention some period about which we may look for you.

'Your sincere Friend,

'FREDERICK MAXWELL.

‘P.S.—I may mention, lest you should be thinking of that little unpleasantness to which I *fancied* you alluded, before you left us, that I have taken steps to have things put on a proper footing.

‘Forgive me. But may we say some day next week? Suppose Monday? Even now I feel that those vile labourers of mine are about striking work.’

Jenny smiled a little as she read; but the next moment her bright forehead contracted. Was she thinking how awkwardly this came—just in the middle of this little excitement—possibly, too, in the middle of some plans that had been working in her little head? This was an invitation that could scarcely be well resisted; and so she must the next week. The obvious course for Jenny was to crowd together all her little enjoyments, and whatever little prospectus she was turning over in her mind. And it did seem as though some one had whispered this *projet* to Jenny, for she left her chamber with a steady

step, and a smile of confidence on her rosy lips.

Mr. Franklyn had grown very kind, and almost affectionate, to Jenny of late—since he fancied she was finding herself uncomfortable among them. He used to speak softly and graciously to her, as it were to encourage her, by way of counterpoise to any little prejudice the younger people might have against her. And now of this morning, when they were gone out, and Jenny was sitting quietly in the drawing-room, within the shadow of the great Sir Welbore's broad *Times* sheet, Mr. Franklyn came in, rubbing his head, in a troubled, questioning way, and said, 'Jenny, I am going to try and get these papers into order. Will you come and help me, and make a day of it?'

Jenny rose at once, with a look towards Sir Welbore of gentle suffering (the gold rims of the double eye-glass were scanning her, over the *Times*), and floated away to the door. 'Ah, hum,' said Sir Welbore, 'quite a sort of

secretary, I declare.' The girls and young Craven had talked of a party to their island, some time after lunch. She did not care for their sports. Besides, they would not want her; would not miss her, perhaps.

A wretched man of business—wretched at accounts—at arrangement—at seeing his way generally; and yet always groping and ferreting, and shovelling, and 'getting things settled,' which meant frightful disorganization. He was turning over tin boxes, emptying them, as into a gigantic dust-bin. He might have had a train of carts at the door to cart away all the stroddy or silt; and still he was always settling. He had a genius for this sort of disorganization.

Gentle Jenny sighed as she surveyed the *débris*. It was as though wreckers had got in. A safe, standing wide open,—boxes spilled,—and a round table to the left, overbalanced by the load of old law-papers, on its side on the ground, having come down in the night with a crash. Poor man! He had

thought to have everything orderly by Sir Welbore's coming.

Jenny, after her plaintive way, soon struck out a plan. She was for action. She proposed they should do the sorting together, and that they should eliminate a good worthless proportion from the mass by wholesome destruction, tearing up, &c. Of such sort were old tradesmen's bills, circulars, pamphlets, tracts—for there was a varied assortment. And very shortly Jenny was standing up to her knees in a heap of paper shreds. She was a brave workwoman.

She found a little entertainment, too, in the matter. She whetted her woman's curiosity as she went along, taking quick, short glances at this and that paper, some of which set her wondering. She lightened the work for Mr. Franklyn by talking cheerfully, and getting him to talk about various private matters. He found a great relief in this sort of communion, and gradually, as he found himself better by the intercourse, spoke with her about this and that little matter according as a paper,

a bill, or application turning up out of the heap suggested the subject. This community of work makes people strangely confidential. Jenny gave wise, sagacious replies—not very profound truly, but practical: at least they pointed to one distinct course to him, poor soul. Tossing between many, it was welcome, as something distinct and certain.

‘I wish,’ he said at last, when they had already made surprising progress,—‘I wish I had known of you before—that is, that you were so clever and useful.’

‘But,’ said Jenny, ‘dear sir, you would never—if you recollect—let me—that is——’

‘Because,’ he said, ‘I never knew—I never thought. Perhaps, after all, if Charles *had*—but no matter now. I ought to be able to do these things. I was brought up to business. But someway there has so much come together upon my poor head of late, all at once, that——’

Some one tapped at the door.

‘The steward, sir,’ said the servant, ‘wants to see you particular.’

'Yes, yes,' said he wearily, and moved mechanically to the door.

But Jenny jumped up, with something like a half shriek—'Oh, sir, sir, you won't leave me here. Oh, I dare not! Indeed, it is impossible. All these precious documents——'

Mr. Franklyn smiled. 'Ah, Jenny,' he said, 'I would trust you with—with—no matter, it will do another time. This is my life, you see. Always at call for this, that, and the other. A sort of gentleman-waiter, wanted by every one. No one to confide in—to help me—to advise me. The poor girls, what can *they* do? There is this business of Charlotte's money. Crowle says it will all go smooth; but I have a presentiment that we shall not get it. Nothing goes smooth with me—never did. God help me!'

He sat down in a chair, and passed his hands nervously over his forehead. He had quite given way of a sudden. Jenny had never seen him so before, but she said not a word either of comfort or consolation, but went

on with her work. Mr. Franklyn seemed to find a sort of relief in finding some one to confide his wretchedness to.

‘And poor Charlotte,’ he went on—‘my true, faithful, working, unselfish Charlotte—if anything *should*—goodness!—I think, Jenny, I should die. The disgrace, the mortification, before those cold, proud people. I think—I think I never *could* get over it. More for *her* sake; for I am getting very used to blows and the degradations of debt. Poor, darling Charlotte! No one knows what a comfort she has been to me.’

‘Dear me! dear me!’ said Jenny, ‘how surprising! I thought all was arranged quite smooth; and that Charlotte was to be so happy. How odd, I am sure—*they* all think so—at least, Sir Welbore——’

‘Hush, Jenny,’ said Mr. Franklyn, looking round nervously—‘exactly, exactly.’

Jenny, very busy now tearing the papers vigorously, with her back to Mr. Franklyn, was calmly smiling to herself. She was no hypocrite, and she did not love Charlotte *very*

much; so her most honest course was to remain silent.

Mr. Franklyn went on: 'If you were to know, Jenny, what I have suffered since you left us. No one knows it. But to be fighting off disgrace and exposure with all sorts of shifts, and even tricks—to be walking through our county pointed at as an embarrassed man, who has just escaped arrest by some ingenious trick, thought of by Crowle; and our family as good—better than the rest of them—so proud. Oh, Jenny, Jenny, there is only one knows what I suffer—poor Charlotte. And yet she unconsciously *makes* me suffer more than anything.'

Jenny said something now—but still coldly enough—

'You shouldn't take these gloomy views, sir. This affair will go well enough, you'll see. Mr. Crowle will be back—when, sir?'

'To-morrow evening,' said he, with a smile—a very wan smile; 'we shall be out of suspense by that time. Even he, Crowle, I don't think is the same to us latterly—(nobody

is the same to us latterly). He has heard something, or somebody has told him something.'

'Told him something!' said Jenny. 'Oh, impossible, sir!'

Jenny, being utterly ignorant of all the facts, was scarcely entitled to pronounce as to the possibility or impossibility, but Mr. Franklyn understood her.

'Some foolish joke which these poor thoughtless children played upon him. It has hurt his sensibility. I don't know, I'm sure.'

'Oh, I am confident, I am certain'—almost enthusiastically—'this is some mistake. Dear Charlotte, so steady, so quiet, so sensible, she wouldn't——'

'Ah, exactly,' said he, 'just what I would have supposed. Yet, some way, I think, he has got to dislike Charlotte, and before you would actually almost say he seemed to have a sort of partiality for her.'

Jenny grew thoughtful on this, and smiled down upon a bundle of papers.

'But he is a little changed. We are not

the same as another family,' continued he; 'we are an unlucky generation. Even there's my cousin, John Hall, who lives at Dieppe, a wealthy man (we have all his papers here somewhere)—even he, an old bachelor, and we, his only relations, have nothing to expect from him. He has almost told me as much. We are different from other people, my dear Jenny, and always will be. And to tell you the truth, I wish the struggle was over, for I am, indeed, getting very tired.'

He looked very tired, that poor, worn, wan creature, who had been battling now so many years.

'These,' said Jenny, holding a loose bundle of law parchments, 'What is to be done with these—they look new?'

Mr. Franklyn had lighted on letters or papers of his own, and scarcely heard her. Jenny looked up, and seeing him engaged, looked at this bundle again, and answered her own question for herself. They were new clean deeds, labelled outside "Indenture of Mortgage," but there were blanks whereon the

names should have been. Jenny having a sharp instinct, at once saw the true conclusion, that this was an 'arrangement' which, like very many of the Franklyn arrangements, had proved abortive. So, when Mr. Franklyn came back into the world once more, and asked, 'What did you say, Jenny?' they were out of her hand, and buried under a heap of paper lumber.

After an hour's more work, 'Now go, Jenny,' said he. 'You must be tired, and I am getting very selfish. Now go and get some fresh air.'

Jenny did not want fresh air—would have laboured cheerfully in that vineyard for weeks, if necessary. To say the truth, she found it rather a piquant occupation, and used to dip now and again into letters, to see if they were of value and worth preserving. But at Mr. Franklyn's almost stern, peremptory bidding she stole away quietly, and passed through the drawing-room, to get her bonnet. She was a little heated with stooping, and looked really brilliant. She was going to the garden

to get a few flowers. She would soon be shut up in the grim wilderness of London, poor child!

Here, bathing, as it were, in the bosom of a softly-cushioned arm-chair, was Sir Welbore, his gold double eye-glasses clinging to the bridge of his nose, with a gentle nip. He was travelling laboriously down the hard high-roads of the Leading Journal, and had scarcely made half his journey. He was delayed by a sort of political economy 'rut' that was full in his way. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had been speech-making at Paddington, and that brilliant financier had been dwelling in gorgeous rhetorical fireworks on the 'buoyancy of the national resources,' and complimenting the British tax-payer on his 'elasticity.' Sir Welbore was a little bewildered by the glare, and, as it were, saw rings and stars before his eyes; out of which chaos arose a complacent thought—more an expression than a thought—a rich sonorous platitude, which he mistook for a thought—something that jingled like 'expansion of the currency' and 'depre-

ciation of paper.' He was addressing a spectral crowded meeting, with 'And, sir, when I see the glut of precious metals which must eventually go near to the final depreciation of our paper currency, and I will add, our credit——' At this point Jenny glided through, with her little waggoner's hat in her hand.

A real audience—an 'intelligent young person, too,' who took an interest in that sort of thing, was welcome indeed.

'Strange—hum—Miss—er—Odell, you recollect our little conversation the other night, what I was saying about the expansion of the precious metals?' Indeed, Jenny recollected it. The memory of that conversation would go down with her to her grave. This was conveyed in Jenny's expressive countenance. 'Most singular the way things come out. Here is the right honourable gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer' (he loved these full-sounding dignities), 'at the Paddington Operatives' Institute—hails—let me see—yes—"I hail the introduction of a flood of specie into these countries as symptoms of the

healthy well-being of the State." Did you ever hear such a doctrine? Now I ask you, Miss—er—Odell, what did I say to you about the glut of specie? What did——'

Poor Jenny's memory was, naturally enough, a blank as to the glut of specie—as well might he have put to her Kepler's Laws, in their proper order. But, lost in a gentle wonder at the behaviour of the right honourable gentleman, she murmured—

'Glut of specie! Ah, yes—yes, so true: exactly. How strange!'

'Strange!' said Sir Welbore; 'did you ever know anything like it? I tell you I am not one of those who believe in this man; and I tell you, Miss—er—Odell—if I had been at that—er—Paddington meeting, I should have said to him—Sir, when I see—(pray, take a chair—I don't wonder you are interested in these studies)—I should say to him—Sir'—And poor Jenny sat down with all the gentleness of an angel, and heard out the whole of the observations which would have been addressed to the right honourable gentleman who

directs the finances of this mighty empire. She listened in ecstasy ; when he had finished the meeting broke out into applause.

‘How delightful ! It is so rarely,’ she said, at the end, ‘that one meets a person at whose feet one can sit and listen in this way. It seems so easy, and yet so dreadfully difficult.’

‘It depends on the way these things are put,’ said he, complacently. ‘I don’t think my friend Franklyn has much turn that way. He is content with leaving his gold locked up there, at his banker’s, without ever him asking the famous question—What is a pound-note ?’

Something flashed up in Jenny’s full, round face—as though something had been whispered to her. She sighed very deeply, and then said, with mournfulest commiseration—

‘Poor, dear Mr. Franklyn ! Ah, sir, *he* knows well the value of a pound.’

‘Oh—ah, of course, there were early difficulties in the family. He weathered them, I believe, with general skill.’

‘Ah,’ said Jenny, ‘*indeed* yes. He is a good, brave man—and has fought struggling, I may

say, all his life. It really amounts to heroism,' said Jenny, enthusiastically.

'Of course—of course—and therefore he has succeeded. Any one that properly puts their shoulder to the wheel, you know——'

'Succeeded!' said Jenny, mournfully. 'Ah, sir, it will never be known—it was not *his* fault. They have never yet *dared* to say *that*,' said Jenny, excitedly.

'I believe him to be a very estimable person, indeed, but, er'—and Sir Welbore, bethinking him of a compliment that had been paid him by some one, who afterwards asked him for his interest and obtained it—that he was a first-rate cross-examiner, and should have been at the bar, thought how he would skilfully practise his wonderful gifts on this young person.

'Yes—er—I have heard he managed his affairs—got them round, you know, wonderfully?'

Jenny sighed again.

'We can't command success,' said the Baronet, uneasily, and forgetting his amateur

wig and gown. 'He *has* been successful—at least—h'm,' he added, remembering his wig and gown; 'he has — er — positively extricated himself?'

'Oh yes; oh, to be sure, of course,' said Jenny, hastily. 'Quite, I believe, sir, altogether—entirely.'

She was in sad confusion, for she saw she had been nearly betraying her benefactor. But Sir Welbore saw it too.

'But I understood this family—er—were now, I might say, opulent. I don't exactly understand, or see my way. I think it scarcely above board, or——'

'Oh, sir, sir,' said Jenny, piteously, 'if you were to know all the pains dear Mr. Franklyn takes—the weary nights, when we are all in bed. He is killing himself; indeed it is not his fault.'

The Baronet smiled grimly. He thought it was his acute powers of cross-examination had brought all this out.

'Pon my word, really, I was not prepared; that is—but no matter, Mr. Hodge, our profes-

sional adviser will be here on Thursday, and—er—my friend Franklyn will, of course, be prepared to meet him—will see that everything is explicit. You will excuse me, Miss—er—Odell. I have some letters—er.'

Jenny took her way sorrowfully from the room, carrying her little hat reversed, as it were, as though she were at a military funeral. Sir Welbore looked after her, and thought of his own penetration. He said to himself many times, in a tone of pique—'Pon my word! 'pon my word!' This was Jenny's morning's work, and it was a fair instalment, considering the little time that was left to her.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SMOKING-ROOM.

JENNY went out to gather flowers. She took her way to the garden, her hat in hand, to allow the breezes to fan her forehead. The truth was she felt she was a little heated about that region, for she was full of a rich generous blood; and for the last two or three months, since she had begun her secretarial duties at Mr. Maxwell's, had been taking abundance of a generous port wine, 'ordered' her by proper authority. Sometimes, therefore, this rich generous fluid rushed to her forehead, and would take up its abode there for an hour or more.

She gathered her flowers; then went forth to the fields, by the river, through the wood,

and she felt the heat gratefully subsiding. A very pretty river it was, and she stood beside it for some time, mournfully watching the current pass by, and carry down the stray flower or two she cast upon its surface. So absorbed was she, that for several moments she did not perceive the sky was growing cloudy, nor did she hear a bold, hearty voice calling to her—more properly ‘hailing’ her. She looked up in affright. In a sort of bower, or natural alcove, which was on the river’s bank, had been stretched out young Craven, taking his mid-day cigar, and reading the authorized Sporting Journal; a combination of luxuries he was fond of.

‘Hallo!’ he cried again, ‘Miss Bell—Miss Bell!’

Jenny was scared. The privacy of her little meditation to be so rudely broken in upon. She was in a tremble, and instinctively turned to fly. She walked away quickly.

‘Hallo! hallo!’ said young Craven, rising hastily, ‘where are you going to, Miss Bell? Don’t run away, I say. Do wait.’

Jenny looked back indecisively, fluttered a moment, then went on.

‘Good gracious!’ said young Craven, testily, ‘what a creature she is! I can’t make her out. I *say*,’ he shouted, ‘*do* stop. Well, then, we shall see who can go fastest—a race, then!’ And he started in pursuit.

Poor Jenny!—she stopped in one second—a frightened fawn, run down. The hunter came up, panting. The fawn was at his feet, with a piteous prayer for mercy in her eye. The hunter was generous. He took pity on that brilliant face, flushed with agitation, and put his knife back into its sheath.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘you have given me such a chase. What is the matter? Why did you run away?’

Jenny, barely yet recovered, looked round with alarm.

‘Oh, Mr. Craven,’ she said, ‘you frightened me so! I must go back—indeed I must.’

‘*Must*,’ he said, laughing. ‘Why, must? Are you on parole? Are the gates of Grey Forest to be shut at mid-day—eh?’

Jenny raised her eyes and began to laugh.

‘Oh, Mr. Craven,’ she said, and began to laugh again.

The youth grew a little uneasy.

‘Something is amusing you,’ he said; ‘I hope you don’t find any——’

Jenny was serious in a second—nay, earnest, anxious.

‘No, no, Mr. Craven,’ she said, ‘I was amused at the strange, quaint way you put things. Out on parole! That was, indeed, what I was laughing at—*indeed* it was. I am but a poor governess, and thrown with ordinary people, and never—scarcely ever—hear an original thought.’

The youth smiled.

‘But, I say again, what are you in such a hurry about? Why did you fly from me? I know I am a rough bear of a creature.’

‘*Rough!*’ said Jenny, demurely. ‘Oh, it’s not that—that is, I mean—I like roughness—that is—no—I—I—don’t—I mean: oh! I

must go back.' And poor Jenny, in hopeless confusion, turned again to fly.

'Good gracious!' said the youth, unusually pleased. 'Do wait—I have something to say—I have a message. Hallo! there's the rain at last. I knew it was coming.' And half-a-dozen rude, heavy splashes came down, as pioneers of a heavy drenching shower.

'This way,' said young Craven; 'here's the smoking-room, as I call it, just at hand. How lucky! Don't lose a second. It will take hours to soak through these trees.'

Jenny was aghast, and shrunk.

'No, no,' she said, 'it can't be.' And her face expressed 'rather die first.' 'Let me go home!'

'What absurd nonsense!' he said, impatiently. 'It is three-quarters of a mile to the house. There it comes,' he added, as the sluices opened, and it began to descend like a cataract.

Jenny still hesitated, but he took her hand decisively, and led her, half resisting, under

the trees. There they were in shelter, while they heard the rain all round, pattering fiercely among the branches, as on the roof of a gigantic green-house.

They were silent for a few moments.

‘By Jove!’ said he, ‘it looks as if it were set in.’

Jenny sighed and kept looking out nervously—perhaps for help.

‘This is quite jolly,’ said he—‘quite an adventure—ain’t it?’

But Jenny was in sore distress.

‘Oh, let us go,’ she said again—‘let us go; I have done very—*very* wrong.’

The youth laughed in his loud way.

‘I don’t know what to think,’ he said; ‘I *know* that I am a rude ogreish fellow—at least, they all tell me so—but still, I must say, I never intend to frighten ladies, the way I *appear* to have done. I must be something awful in manner and appearance.’

Jenny smiled; she was beginning to get confidence.

‘Indeed, no,’ she said; ‘I don’t find that;

on the contrary—that is, I mean, there were other reasons.’

‘Other reasons,’ said the youth; ‘come, come, this is getting exciting; out with them, Miss Bell.’

‘I did not mean that,’ said Jenny, haughtily.

‘But you *said* so,’ said he; ‘come, I have you there. I insist on knowing. Indeed, you owe it to me—come.’

‘Oh!’ said Jenny, ‘I am ashamed to say it. But I *assure* you—you may believe me—it was not *that*.’

‘Not what?’ said the youth; ‘we are all in confusion. Not what?’

Jenny, pulling nervously at her gloves, and thus cruelly pressed, remained silent. The youth looked down at her, much amused. He was beginning to think he had strange powers of mind, which had hitherto lain dormant.

‘I mean,’ said Jenny, desperately, and looking up with her most brilliant colour in her cheek (fruity)—‘I mean—at least thought—I believe you hated—that is, disliked me.’

‘Dislike you,’ said the youth, gravely ;
‘what put that into your head?’

‘At first, I mean;’ said Jenny (the first button of her glove coming off in her fingers).

‘At first, you mean,’ said he. ‘Oh, I see! No, no—what a delusion!’

‘Oh, you did,’ said Jenny, mournfully.
‘You read my face, and I *know* it—and you thought me—that is, you had an instinctive sort of feeling——’

‘Good gracious!’ said he, ‘what an idea!’

‘Oh, you know it is true,’ said Jenny, mournfully. ‘You always form a judgment when you first see a person. Ah, yes, and you said so—ah! you know you did.’

‘Said so,’ the youth answered, guiltily, and his thoughts went back to that first dinner. He *had* said so.

‘And you don’t mean to tell me,’ he added, with a curling lip, ‘that any one——’

Jenny clasped her hands in affright.

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘no—no—don’t think of such a thing; I didn’t say she did—I merely guessed—that is, I never meant to tell.’

‘Oh, of course,’ said he, smiling a little bitterly, ‘I understand. But now,’ he added, seriously, ‘I will confess. You won’t be angry with me. At first—just at first—I did feel a little bit, you know; I don’t know why — it was the most unreasonable thing in the world. But I assure you, you may believe me, it was not for more than—really I believe not more than a day. And now——’

He paused a second. The other button of Jenny’s glove was nearly off.

‘Well, at any rate, we are made up now. You don’t hate me?’

‘No, no, no,’ murmured Jenny (second button off).

‘And I never did dislike you; on the contrary,’ he said, hesitatingly, ‘this explanation will put everything on a satisfactory basis. In fact, from the time I heard—forgive my alluding to it—of a certain little history—of a certain sacrifice, which was really, I must say——’

‘Oh, don’t, don’t,’ said Jenny, with a soft

smile, and pressing her hands to her side, as if from a sudden spasm—‘please, don’t!’

‘Since I heard,’ he went on, ‘of such noble conduct, as I must call it——’

‘Oh,’ said Jenny, ‘dearest Charlotte—I am sure it was she—she will always—I *wish* she would not. It——’

‘No, no. It was not Charlotte; at least, I think not,’ said he, reflectively.

Jenny sighed.

‘Some way,’ she said, ‘latterly, I am sure, dearest Charlotte does not like me so much. I don’t know why; but so it is. Perhaps she thinks I was wrong, and does not take so indulgent a view as you so kindly do. I have very few friends,’ Jenny said, sadly,—‘very few!’

The youth looked down on her with interest. Pity, as we know, is akin to something warmer.

‘Some way,’ he added, reflectively, ‘I *have* remarked Charlotte is not exactly—that is, is not what you call an enthusiastic friend of yours.’

‘And yet,’ said Jenny, ‘if she only knew how I love and esteem her. Do you know,’ she added, looking fixedly at young Craven, ‘I think she more nearly approaches my ideal of perfection in a human creature than any being I ever knew. She is so good, so grand, so calm, so quiet. There is a placid temper about her I really envy.’

‘Ah, exactly,’ said he, ‘that’s just it. I almost wish she was a little more——’

‘Hush!’ said Jenny, looking out anxiously.

The rain was beginning to abate, and they both heard the sound of wheels. Then the rain came on more furiously, and the wheels seemed to come nearer. Presently they saw the little open basket-carriage rolling along the avenue, with Charlotte and one of the girls, the latter driving.

The avenue wound very close by the river, and very close to young Mr. Craven’s smoking-room; and to the surprise of the tenants of that apartment, the basket-carriage drove in upon the grass, and drew up under the outside

shelter of the great clump of trees and bushes which made the walls and roof of the smoking-room. They were going to wait until the violence of the shower was somewhat abated. There was a smart page behind. They were so near they could hear them talking in the carriage.

Jenny said softly, 'Let us go round and meet them. It is dear Charlotte!'

The youth coloured, paused a moment, and then said awkwardly—'Hush! not a word. We will surprise them. A capital joke at dinner. See what fun we shall have!'

Jenny lifted her eyebrows inquiringly, and with a bright smile; but the youth only pressed his fingers to his lips, and did not give further shape to his capital joke. And so they remained still without daring to move.

The smart page, a quick, intelligent Irish lad, with a taste for horses, and ripening fast into a light jockey, had got down from the back seat for more convenient shelter, and walked up and down, trying to divert the tedium of waiting. The light jockey now stood

at the ponies' heads; now pitched a broken branch into the bushes; now stamped up and down and warmed his hands; and now examined objects of natural history in the ground or in the trees—a very sharp, quiet, and discreet Irish youth.

In a few seconds the rain abated, and the young girl gave her ponies one light lash of her whip, and drove off; the wheels ran over the grass as on velvet. Just at this moment the little jockey, still busy with natural history, had come round to the very entrance of the smoking-room, and looked in. He heard the young girl calling 'Now, Frank,' and was after them in a second, scaling the back seat very nimbly, but he looked behind him long.

It seemed to the two tenants of the chamber that he had not noticed them. Jenny was nervous.

'I must go now,' she said; 'not an instant more can I stay. I fear we have done wrong, very wrong.'

The youth was awkward in his answer. He murmured something about 'capital fun,' and

‘a joke at dinner.’ But the clouds now breaking, and the rain finally ceasing, Jenny gathered up her skirts, so as to avoid the wet grass, looked round, and said very sweetly, ‘Now, you must not come with me. Good-bye! We are friends now—at least I suppose I must believe that you do not quite hate me; so for the few days I stay, we will live in peace and amity.’

He started.

‘What! Going? I did not know this—are you serious?’

‘Good-bye,’ said Jenny; and shot away over the grass, very lightly, indeed, and gracefully.

The youth looked after her long, lit his cigar, and became pensive.

‘By Jove!’ he said, at last, a little impatiently. With whom he connected this heathen appeal is not known. Perhaps he was thinking of his Charlotte.

His Charlotte was skimming along the wet gravel in the basket-carriage—and, it may be, thinking of him.

The young girl who was driving presently spoke of him, and said,—

‘I wonder where Charles has hid himself all the morning?’

The smart jockey, whose seat brought him very close to the ladies, and who was always much entertained in these rides by the scraps of conversation that reached him, here broke in respectfully—

‘Please, ma’am, I saw Mr. Charles and Miss Bell behind the trees where we were waiting,’ and he touched his hat again, by way of punctuation, or full stop. Was this Irish lad only following his nature, or was this a spice of malice? Neither of the ladies answered him; but drove on in silence up to the door of the house.

Mr. Franklyn passed a miserable day in the society of his papers. This had become a sort of mania with him, though perfectly bootless. Decency then required a certain amount of personal attendance upon his guest, the Baronet. But that potentate—who was put out, by having only imperfectly digested portions of

his *Times*—just as a cobra does half its blanket—was testy ; and besides, had clearly something on his mind.

They went out together, and after much dry clearing of his throat, and non-natural huskiness, he said to Mr. Franklyn—

‘You know—er—that Mr. Hodge will be here—er—on Thursday.’

‘Yes ; yes,’ said the other, hastily.

‘He will bring with him all the papers. You know, Franklyn,’ said the Baronet, stopping short, ‘a thing of this sort is—er—hum—business, pure business. No compliments. ‘Xcuse me,’ he added, waving his hand impatiently ; for Mr. Franklyn, colouring much, was about to interrupt. ‘You understand—two business men—hem—you and I—spade, a spade !’

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Franklyn, with some dignity, ‘there is no question about it. Mr. Crowle will be prepared to meet your man of business on Thursday.’

‘Exactly,’ said Sir Welbore ; ‘that’s exactly the footing I wish it to be on—the—er—thing

done, you know. I shouldn't like to have it said that Charles married—er—without—you understand.'

'My daughter,' said Mr. Franklyn, haughtily, 'has seven thousand pounds on the day of her marriage, *down*; if you should require it, before,' he added, with an attempt at sarcasm, 'of course——'

'H'm! h'm! Very good—very good—quite proper, indeed,' said the Baronet; 'quite so. Between you and me, my dear Franklyn,' he added, confidently, but now in good-humour again, 'I *don't* quite like the look of—gold at present.'

Mr. Franklyn looked blankly at him.

'No, it's not healthy—glut of the precious metals—too much stock at the Bank. Between you and me the Chancellor is too fond of paradoxes and tricks. There will be a tightness—we shall be tight by and by, mark my words.'

CHAPTER XXI.

JENNY'S EVENING WORK.

HALF an hour before dinner a chaise came driving up, and Mr. Crowle, the young man of business, jumped out, fresh from London. He sought Mr. Franklyn's room. When the whole party were gathering together for dinner, from azimuth and nadir, and trooping down resplendent, Jenny, who was sliding in by herself in simplest virgin white muslin, and with a crimson flower in her hair, was stopped on the stairs, not by the Mr. Franklyn, the miner of the morning, but by a man the same indeed, but ten years younger: he was bright, cheerful, happy.

'Jenny, Jenny,' he said, in a delighted whisper, 'good news. It is all settled—all *but*

settled! Not only Charlotte's money, but double; so that it will clear us a good deal. There is a load off my breast, and Crowle—good Crowle—has done it all.'

Jenny smiled, pressed his hand cordially, but said nothing. She conveyed an immense deal of indefinite meaning in that squeeze. She passed in hurriedly, but bit her crimson lips as she entered.

Before her was Charlotte, measuring her, not angrily—she was too tranquil for that—but with a shade of scorn and contempt. On our Jenny's active mind a light suddenly flashed. 'She knows all, and is harshly misconstruing our little innocent adventure of the morning.' And she glided straight up to her and took her hand, and said (Sir Welbore was standing beside Charlotte)—

'Dearest Charlotte, I have such a business to tell you of. Such an adventure as we had this morning, shut up under a tree, dear Charlotte. Only think, while the floodgates of heaven—is not that right, Mr. Wells?' added Jenny, demurely, to the curate, wishing to be

set right in her Scripture—‘the floodgates of heaven were opened, and I thought would have swept us away into the river.’

The half-defiant, half-insolent way in which our Jenny made this declaration, was, to use the French word, *impayable*. Sir Welbore, finance being off his mind, allowed himself to be interested.

‘Where — hum—was this—er—unpleasant affair—under that shower—hey? ’Pon my word, very inconvenient.’

‘Indeed,’ said Jenny, demurely, ‘only for Mr. Craven——’

‘Indeed,’ said the Baronet, with interest. ‘And how did Charles help you? Come now!’

Jenny told it all with natural simplicity, but at the same time with wonderful confidence for her. But there was a pleasant gaiety in her tone when she addressed herself to Charlotte. Indeed, there was a curious change in Jenny this day or two back. She was gradually gliding into the centre place, and drawing most of the circle to her. Sir Welbore called her his ‘financial pupil;’ young Craven took in-

terest in her ; the curate worshipped ; and Charlotte—how was Charlotte inclined to her ? At this moment she was looking at her with a strange expression, half scared—almost breathless, at what she thought this effrontery. But presently she grew defiant, and answered Jenny with her old calmness.

Young Craven came down last, and in great spirits. Dinner was then announced ; and he took down, as was his duty, his affianced, Charlotte. There was a tone of joyousness over the whole party this day. Mr. Franklyn, filled with his good news, was cheerful, which in him was the same as the merriment of another person. Sir Welbore was complacent. He was thinking of writing a letter to the *Dorkingshire Conservative*, on the miserable fallacies of the Chancellor as to the expansion of the precious metals. Young Craven was boisterous—he knew why—Jenny, nearly opposite, was bright, and sparkled and shone like a precious stone. Mr. Franklyn said gaily—

‘ Well, Charles, I suppose you got through the morning somehow ? ’

Young Craven coloured a little.

‘Oh! I was out, sir.’

‘What! under that shower?’

‘Oh! no, sir,’ said the youth, with an intelligent look at Jenny, which with stupid complacency he fancied was understood but by her. Charlotte’s eyes were upon him.

She dropped her voice—

‘You were not out in that storm?’ she said.

‘Oh! no,’ he answered in the same tone, ‘I was in shelter—got home quite safe. By-the-by, what shall we do to-night?’

Charlotte’s eyes were still upon him.

‘Why make a mystery?’ she said, mildly; ‘what a pity! You are not beginning to be afraid of me, I hope?’

‘Afraid!’ said he, confused. ‘What do you mean, Charlotte?’

‘Oh! Jenny—Miss Bell—has been amusing the company with your comic adventures. So you see——’

His cheeks blazed up, and he threw a fierce look at Jenny. Jenny was delighted. She

was just opposite, and was legitimately in the conversation.

‘Good gracious!’ she said, with a bright toss of her head, ‘you don’t suppose we are carrying on a conspiracy, Mr. Craven; you won’t get me to join in manufacturing terrible secrets of that sort. No, no—quite a mistake, I assure you,’ said Jenny, with an engaging smile.

The youth was angry, and even bitter. He had been made ridiculous—even guilty-looking; and I am afraid the dialogue between him and Charlotte in some degree reflected that tone. Jenny spoke on:—

‘Do you know,’ said she, aloud, and in her *new* gay way—(she was picking a grape now and again)—‘I seem to have done something wicked—I feel like a—a—Sir Welbore, you can tell me; what do they call the people at trials that appear against their companions, you know, Sir Welbore?’

‘King’s evidence, I er—believe,’ said the baronet, pompously, for he loved to hear the chime of his own name oft repeated.

Of this night Jenny, with new prerogatives, sat enthroned. She flitted about the drawing-room very brilliant, Charlotte watching with a curious look. With a strange confidence, Jenny came over to her, engaging as a child, and sitting down beside her, said anxiously, 'Dear Charlotte, you look so worn and ill! quite changed, I declare. You must be ill.' Charlotte's was not a trained temper. She almost shook her off. Jenny lifted her eyes with gentle astonishment. Mr. Wells, the curate, was standing by and watching.

'I am perfectly well,' said Charlotte. 'I am no actress. I speak what I feel.'

Jenny smiled. Young Craven was in sight, affecting to talk earnestly to Mr. Franklyn, but looking over wistfully at them. The sensible girl's voice had a slight quiver.

'When do you leave here?' said Charlotte, speaking quickly. 'I hear you speak of going.'

'Oh soon — soon — too soon,' said Jenny, speaking a little loud. 'I must quit this dear old house, and go back to—to school! A dream—such a dream!'

‘Not too soon,’ said the other, looking at her stedfastly.

Jenny laughed a silver laugh, with the faintest fringe of a scoff. ‘One would say, dearest, you wished me away. How inhospitable! Perhaps I am in the way—in *your* way—eh?’

This latter she said in a lower key.

‘What can it be?’ she went on. ‘You are not afraid of anything? Afraid of poor me!’ and again the mocking laugh furnished accompaniment. No one would know Jenny to-night.

Poor Charlotte seems to have been sadly unsteady and off her centre. ‘Afraid!’ she said, colouring. ‘No, indeed! I am stronger than I seem! and know more than I seem to know.’

Jenny was lost in wonder at the poor weak declaration. She said, drily, to Mr. Wells, who was drawing near, and had only caught scraps of this curious dialogue, ‘Shall we have a game to-night, Mr. Wells? Do get them together and make them play. Now, dear,

cross Charlotte, are you in the humour for that ?'

Young Craven was coming across eagerly as Jenny was speaking.

'Do play,' said Jenny. '*Play against me?*'

The sensible girl trembled. Her eyes lighted up.

'I am not afraid,' she said, as she said before.

Then said Jenny, as Mr. Craven stood beside them and listened—

'Do you know, dear, I feel *as if I had won already?*'

She left the affianced ones together, as was her duty, and fled away. She recollected something, as she passed Mr. Crowle, who had been watching her, with something like a weak solution of admiration—at least, he was astonished at the change. The young man of business seemed to suggest something suddenly to her, for her eyes flashed. She wandered into the greenhouse by herself to pick a flower (she humbly asked Mr. Franklyn's leave), and from the plants presently came a silvery voice —'Mr. Crowle !

He rose from his chair and obeyed the call. The curate would have rushed too, but was late.

‘Could you help me down with that geranium pot? Thanks—there—now you can go back.’

But Mr. Crowle was not inclined; as yet, at least.

‘It is a long time since you have been here,’ he said.

‘By the way, you go back to London to-morrow?’ said Jenny.

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘early in the morning; the first thing.’

‘And why not stay?’ said she, with interest. ‘You are no sooner come than gone.’

He laughed at what was not very clear.

‘I must go,’ he said; ‘business—important business.’

‘Business—always business,’ said Jenny, trimming a geranium with a little pair of garden scissors. ‘Some little bill of costs; why can’t you stay, then, but a few days—*my* last days?’

'It is the family business,' he said. 'You must have heard of that. We are trying to dig a fortune for Miss Charlotte out of Lombard Street.'

'Trying!' said Jenny, with astonishment. 'Why, dear Mr. Franklyn told me, before dinner, it was all settled; that it was all done. And I am sure,' added she, 'they *all* think so.'

'He is premature,' said he, impatiently. 'How fond people are of chattering. Nothing of the kind. It may be done; it may *not* be done. I may say it rests with me.'

'Ah,' said Jenny, with one of her old looks of intense, devout admiration; and laying down the garden scissors, the better to clasp her hands, 'Ah, how good of you—*how* good!'

Mr. Crowle smiled.

'You do everything,' she went on, 'for this family?'

Mr. Crowle smiled.

'Our interest,' he said, 'very often goes beside our affection.'

'Ah, yes,' said Jenny, with meaning, 'and our affection often rises above our interest:

even above what foolish people would be offended with.'

Mr. Crowle looked at her, a little inquiringly.

'Yes,' Jenny went on in a torrent of words; 'yes, *that* is true and genuine regard; and that is what they said was so generous, so noble in Mr. Crowle. Those two foolish children, they would laugh at anything; but I was amazed when I heard of it. But I call it *real* nobleness.'

A slight little contortion passed over Mr. Crowle's placid face.

'So they tell everything in this family, it seems,' he said. 'No secrets.'

'Poor children,' said Jenny, commiseratingly, 'they want a little discretion. Even our dear Charlotte says things sometimes against her own interest.'

'And she told you,' said he, 'about this—this——'

'The little joke,' said Jenny, resuming her scissors and snipping away merrily. 'It was a little absurd; and even Sir Welbore, who is a little dry—there, I declare, they want me.'

Mr. Franklyn says no one makes his evening cup like me,' and Jenny tripped in.

Mr. Crowle followed slowly, looking round on all with a peculiar smile. 'Told to a full dinner-table, I suppose. Ah! very well! very good.'

'My dear Crowle,' said Franklyn, taking him affectionately by the arm, 'we must be up for you in the morning. I shall see about your breakfast myself. It is so good of you. I feel a new man. Positively,' he continued, gaily, 'I shall begin to have quiet nights again. You have taken millstones off my heart. How shall we all thank you?'

'You shall all thank me on my next visit,' said Mr. Crowle, with an agreeable smile; 'that is, when *I deserve them*. But you won't mind my stealing off to bed; you know I have to be up in the morning.'

'My dear Crowle,' said the other, 'let me ring for a candle.'

'No, no, let me go quietly—good night—*good* night. You may begin to sleep to-night.'

In high spirits Jenny watched him dis-

appear, then turned to take a glance round the company. She was standing at the greenhouse, and the natural glow of colour diffused over her stood out well upon the green background, she thinking which of her slaves she would call next.

Suddenly, Charlotte, who had watched every motion of her—who had seen her enter the greenhouse with Mr. Crowle, and come back again—who had seen him depart, and seen, too, Jenny's look, as he quitted the room—rose up suddenly and went over to Jenny. The sensible girl's intelligence, quickened by distrust, had a presentiment of what had taken place.

She looked at her a moment wistfully.

'Jenny,' she whispered, earnestly, 'be generous—forgive—forget the past.'

'Dear Charlotte,' said Jenny, looking round on the company, 'what do you mean?—you frighten me.'

'Yes,' said Charlotte; 'I own it was wrong, and you suffered a great deal. I beg your pardon humbly—it was wrong. Forgive, not

for my sake, but for his; and if you were to know how his heart is set on this how he lives but for us—oh, Jenny!’

Jenny’s wonder was extreme.

‘Dear Charlotte, what riddles and mysteries are all these? Goodness! I am getting quite nervous. Poor me! a poor, dependent creature, to forgive—to think of forgiving. Ah! Charlotte, you are amusing yourself.’

‘Listen to me—do,’ said the other, more hurriedly, and catching her by the sleeve; for Jenny was moving away; ‘any—any submission, do you hear, for his sake?’

‘I am getting bewildered, dear,’ said Jenny, putting her raised hands upon her forehead; ‘don’t talk this way any more—pray don’t.’

‘Is it possible?’ said the other, with a lip that was beginning to curl. ‘No; I would not believe it—you are not so wickedly vindictive as——’

‘Hush! hush! dear,’ said she, looking round in alarm. ‘What odd things you are saying! Take care, dear. *No, no; I am for going on with our game,*’ added she, with something like a sudden flash of defiance—‘with the

gentlemen, I mean. Just as I feel in a winning humour, too. No, no ; come, dear.'

And she moved away, and went over to the gentlemen, and had presently started a very agreeable little round game.

* * * *

'Good night, Sir Welbore — *good* night. See you to your room? No? Ah, you begin to know your way—ha, ha!'

Sir Welbore remarked to Lady Welbore 'that—that—er—Franklyn was a strange, inconsequential creature, and in—er—a flow of spirits that night.'

'Good night — *good* night, dearest,' said Mr. Franklyn, at the foot of the stairs. 'Sleep well: I shall. No papers to-night, darling—no, nor to-morrow night—ha, ha! An heiress, I declare—quite an heiress! Let me tell you, my pet, it is not every or any woman in the county can bring her husband seven thousand pounds. Good night—*good* night.'

* * * *

In the morning came the mail. Mr. Franklyn got two business letters, which he laughed over. One from Dunton and Co.

Dunton and Co., much outraged with long waiting, and with patience generally exhausted, had reluctantly placed the matter in the hands of Dunton and Co.'s solicitor, who now respectfully named a day, after which he had been instructed to proceed.

Dart, Burton, and Co., an eminent firm of solicitors, with patience also sorely tried, were also on the eve of 'proceeding.' The camel's back, &c.

Mr. Franklyn, after breakfast, went to his desk. With a light heart he wrote to both Dunton and Co., and to Dart, Burton, and Co., telling them that a successful arrangement had just been effected, and that he had written instructions to his agent, Mr. Crowle, now in London, who would wait on them forthwith. 'A thousand apologies, my dear sirs,' wrote Mr. Franklyn, exuberantly, 'for the inconvenience I have put you to. A thousand thanks, too, for your indulgence. But we are now, I am happy to say, getting straight, and shall shortly have the pleasure of enclosing you a cheque for your full amount.'

He posted these two with great satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXII.

JENNY WINS.

SIR WELBORE CRAVEN and 'Lady' were packing up already. They were going to-morrow. Reluctantly, too, was Jenny departing. With the kindest consideration, the baronet had, in a stately manner, offered Jenny the remaining seat in their grand coach which was to come for them. Jenny, overpowered with gratitude, said, humbly, she thankfully accepted so kind, so *considerate* an offer. She looked over at dear Charlotte as she accepted it.

Sir Welbore's man of business, Mr. Hodge, was to arrive that night, and wait a day or two to meet Mr. Crowle. 'Now that everything is so satisfactory, you—er—see, I may as well—er—go.'

‘I am very sorry, Sir Welbore—*very* sorry, that we are to lose you.’

‘Crowle seems a very intelligent person,’ said the other, approvingly. ‘Crowle seems to know his business. Eh?’

‘Invaluable, Sir Welbore. He has been of inestimable assistance to me. Now, I don’t mind saying to you, Sir Welbore, who knows everything, and hears everything’ (Sir Welbore laid his head wisely upon one side, as upon an aërial pillow, and waved his hand, as who should *passez pour cela*), ‘that I have had heavy—very heavy charges to meet upon the estate.’

‘Quite so,’ said Sir Welbore.

‘I am not ashamed to own it,’ said Mr. Franklyn, with a little state. ‘You know it—many know it.’

Sir Welbore lifted his head suddenly from his pillow, not liking this community of knowledge.

‘Well, I don’t scruple confessing that—ha, ha!—that even about Charlotte’s money—ha, ha!—I *was* a little uneasy for a time, you know. Crowle is gloomy by nature.’

‘Quite so,’ said the other. ‘We all want money. ’Pon my word now, I myself shouldn’t object to, say forty thousand pounds just now. There’s the Dudgeley estate going for a mere song. But where is a pauper like me to look for it? There was a time I could afford such things—ha, ha!’

Thus pleasant were the two gentlemen.

At night, when they were all gone to bed, arrived, in a chaise of his own, the baronet’s man of business—a dry man, that seemed as if he was made of any other material in the world but human flesh and bone. By business habits he seemed to have worked everything warm, genial, or moist out of his system, just as racing and boating men do in *their* training. He appeared at breakfast in the morning, spoke scarcely at all, could tell no town news, ate very little, and looked at his watch some dozen times. He looked out of the window occasionally, as if he was expecting somebody to pass by whom he might rush upon and stop. All through the day, he looked at his watch, consulted his pocket-book occasionally, looked

at the door when he was not opposite a window, as though the person who was to pass the window might slip by that way unawares. Sir Welbore whispered he was a most useful sort of person indeed.

Mr. Crowle, Mr. Franklyn said, was at that moment (lunch hour) actually—let him see—at Bootham. The half-past eight train would bring him, or he would telegraph. Sir Welbore's train was half-past five. Great black plate chests, holding dresses instead of plate, were standing in the hall, and beside them Jenny's little trunk, modestly shrinking into a corner, corded neatly, but with economy of rope, and seeming to say piteously, like Mr. Sterne's famous donkey, 'Don't thrash me.'

It was growing dark. The light at the lodge window was lit, and could be seen twinkling. Coal had been brought up for the fires. Shawls, cloaks, sticks, and umbrellas—bound together like Roman fasces—were being borne down from upper chambers. Sir Welbore was making stately progress up and down stairs with no declared object.

Suddenly the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue. Many people looked out of windows—thinking it Sir Welbore's great coach, now nearly due. It was only a gig.

Sir Welbore and Mr. Franklyn were talking in the hall, and heard the wheels.

'It is he,' said Mr. Franklyn, with a smile. 'How lucky; and before you are gone—I am so glad—you can spare us a quarter of an hour. It will be so satisfactory.'

Sir Welbore inclined his head graciously.

Mr. Franklyn went to the door himself and opened it. Through the gloom he saw a gig standing, and a person getting down who was—not Mr. Crowle.

It was the station-master of the railway station.

'Telegraph message, Mr. Franklyn,' said he, handing him the regular pale blue envelope. 'Thought I would take it myself—passing by: you would get it sooner, as it might be important.'

'Very kind of you,' said Franklyn, a little disappointed. 'Thank you.'

‘No Crowle,’ he said to Sir Welbore, opening the envelope. There was no light in the hall, so he turned straight into his study, where there was one.

He came out in a second, and was passing by Sir Welbore, without speaking, when that gentleman called to him—

‘Well? Can’t come by this train—first train to-morrow.’

‘In a moment,’ said the other, in a low voice, and passed upstairs.

He came back in a few moments.

‘Just step in here with me into the study,’ he said. The two entered, and the door was closed.

Sir Welbore’s great coach was now arrived—with its two lamps flaming like lighthouses. The great chests were hoisted up, and his servants began to fasten up the cloaks and shawls—Sir Welbore’s man taking up the fasces on his shoulder, as though he were a real born Roman lictor. Jenny came tripping down, modestly attired for travel, and the hall filled in as with a crowd. The lamps were

now lit. A mild and dignified embracing set in. Now, where was Sir Welbore ?

Out of the study came the two gentlemen—one a ghastly, pale, trembling creature ; the other a hot, fuming, excited person.

Neither spoke. The hot, excited Baronet passed out to his coach, without addressing any adieus to the spectators. The other tottered upstairs. The family looked on with a little wonder. Then came more of a modulated *accolade*. Then Lady Craven entered her coach, with state. Then Jenny, who made as though she would have humbly ascended behind—a place, indeed, too superior for her. Then Sir Welbore entered with a jerk, and flung himself back, muttering ; and finally young Craven, who sat *next* Jenny.

They drove away. The great bee-hive reeling and swinging ; maid and man poised boastfully behind.

When they were gone, and all were turning away from looking after them, a white face was put out from the study-door, and it said—

‘ Charlotte—girls—come in !’

They came in, silent and cowed—they were wondering and afraid. He closed the door, and then the light fell upon his face. Then Charlotte rushed up to him, and put her arms round him.

‘Father, dearest father! It is no harm; it is not worth a thought, if you can bear it.’

There was a white paper in his hand, which was fluttering as though it were being blown by a breeze. He put her back gently.

‘It is all over, dear children,’ he said. ‘God help us—God help you!’

He let Charlotte take the paper from him, and sank—rather fell—into a chair beside him. Charlotte calmly held it over the light, and read in the usual pencil character:—

‘Elec. Teleg. Co.’s Offices,
Charing-cross, 4 o’c. P.M.

‘William Crowle to John Franklyn.

‘It is all off. At the last moment the party has refused. What am I to do next? I don’t know of any other quarter we can try.’

They all remained in silence, looking at the fatal piece of tissue-paper in Charlotte's hand. The younger girls understood it all, and stood there trembling and clinging together.

Mr. Franklyn presently spoke to them in a low, broken voice—yet with an attempt at cheerfulness that seemed ghastly—

‘Come, dear children,’ he said, ‘don’t take it to heart. It is a blow—a great blow ; but we will weather it, as—as—we have done others before.’

‘Oh ! father, father,’ they all burst out, with crying and wailing, and ran up to him.

‘Now, now, don’t,’ said he, mildly, ‘this is foolish. Go upstairs now, like good children, and leave me here with Charlotte. We must only strike out some other plan, that’s all. Go now, like dear, good children. It is not so bad as you think.’

They went away sobbing and lamenting, and left father and daughter together. It seemed a lonely house that night—after all the late company and universal gaiety, so very desolate, as though it had been swept

and cleared to be a fitting tenement for ill news.

Later, Charlotte came up, very quiet and calm, and cheered up the young girls, bade them be of good heart, and all would go well; that Papa was very far-seeing and clever, and that he had already struck out a new plan, which, with their good friend Mr. Crowle's assistance, would help them out of this.

Then the lamp was brought in, and there was an affectation of something being read and of something being worked. But it was wretched — altogether wretched — and long after, when those girls were grown up, they looked back to it with a tremble, as the most miserable night of their life.

They carried out their little bit of acting faithfully for each other's sake; and then, later than usual, went up to bed. Cells—cold, dreary cells—they seemed to them, for that night at least. Charlotte stayed up much later, possibly to talk with her father.

The morning was dark and gloomy, and there were sheets of heavy rain descending

steadily, all about the house. It darkened the air of the breakfast-room additionally as they came down.

Charlotte came in with an air of cheerfulness, which they thought was the assumed one of last night continued. She came with a letter in her hand.

‘Come!’ she said to them, ‘what did I say last night? There is something to encourage us—a letter from an old relative—Cousin John Hall—who has not written these seven years. He talks of coming to England shortly ; and listen to what he says :—“I am curious to see my god-child, little Charlotte, again, and am delighted she is making so good a match. I mean to gratify myself by adding a good sum to her portion, if only to keep up the family credit. I am getting tired of these foreigners, and want to see my own flesh and blood again.” There, children ! there’s a bit of good news for papa. Which of you will run to the study and fetch him in to breakfast?’

Both ran gaily. Charlotte lifted her eyes to Heaven with a bright thankfulness. And

in this acknowledgment there is nothing for herself; it was for the curse of moral squalor and utter desolation thus happily averted from their house.

They came back. 'Papa is not to be disturbed,' they say; 'but we told him through the keyhole.'

'Quite right, dears,' said Charlotte. 'He is busy. I may fill out his tea for him.'

More of that welcome letter was read, and they wondered at what bounded extent Cousin John Hall would stay his liberality for Charlotte. Then more of the letter was read, amid universal delight, and genial complacency on Charlotte's part.

The tea was filled out and getting cold.

'Run again, dear,' said Charlotte. 'Stay, I will go myself.'

She went herself; tapped at his door; tried the handle; spoke through keyhole, but was not answered. She looked through the keyhole, for the key was away, and saw what satisfied her, for she went upstairs quickly to his bedroom.

It was not locked ; but had not been slept in that night.

* * * *

The sensible girl was equal to the emergency. She became on the instant a captain in that disordered house. The true probability flashed upon her in a second ; he had hurried away himself by night to London, to settle that business himself. But still, while this was being set at rest, no harm to provide for the case of another issue. No confusion ; no flurry ; all private, and even secret. Steward, a steady, silent official, is called in ; he knows of other steady men that *he* can depend on ; leave it to him.

Telegraph to London—quickly, too, to Mr. Crowle. Reply in three quarters of an hour. Not been seen there.

All through that day, through the great, heavy sheets of rain, which hung about the house and plantations, like the folds of huge slate-coloured curtains, the steady man and his steady men pursued the task that had been put into their hands. All through the day

Charlotte acted a tremendous part, with consummate bravery. It was a magnificent effort of mind; little household concerns; upstairs, down-stairs, speaking with this one and that, and all the time her heart in her mouth. Her younger sisters were actually imposed on; one was heard singing in her room. These moral deeds are not weighed *here*—cannot, indeed, be known. Thrice noble girl! true as steel, and good as gold.

But it was a long day; as long, as dark. It rolled on heavily until five o'clock, when the door-bell rang gently, and Charlotte, who was in the study, came out hurriedly to open it. It was the steady man with a lantern, with his steady men behind him; all three soaked and saturated with the day's rain. The steady man laid his lantern down on the step outside, and, motioning his men back, came in by himself. He said, clearing his throat:—

‘Miss, Miss, you mustn’t—that is—we have—found him.’

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In that little island, where they used to have their merrymaking teas, had they found John Franklyn, Esq., lying out on his back in the sludge, with his arms stretched out, and a little chemist's bottle of some cheap essential oil beside him.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

JENNY'S WELCOME 'HOME.'

JENNY was once more at her home in Chesterfield Street. Mr. Maxwell was overjoyed to see his 'faithful secretary' again. His whitened face lightened up, as she entered. 'Oh, Miss Bell, I am *so* glad.' He took both her hands in his, and welcomed her like a father receiving back a dear and long-parted daughter—which was, indeed, a phrase we borrow from one of Jenny's letters, describing the scene.

It was new life to him. A sagacious maid who had noted the influence of Jenny's natural character in the house, came good-naturedly to tell her of all that had gone on in her absence. Mr. Maxwell had, indeed, moped and moped—was not the same man. 'It was a charity,

Miss, for you to come. And indeed, Miss,' adds the sagacious maid, 'you are wanted sadly. The house aren't the same since you was gone.'

Jenny—overlooking the grammar—smiled approvingly on this well-meaning person.

'Thank you, Rachel,' she said; 'it is very good of you to think so.'

'And, oh, Miss, she—she's'—this was the popular mode, below stairs, of referring to the mistress of the house—'*she's* been dreadful bad. I don't mean, Miss, worse than is common—but in her ways. Her ways has got awful; and, poor master, such a time as he has had of it!'

'O Rachel,' said Jenny, 'don't. We must recollect how much she suffers. If you or I were tried in the same way,' &c. From this confidential attendant a good many curious details were obtained, under protest, as it were, on our Jenny's side.

Mr. Maxwell fluttered about her awkwardly, that day of her arrival. He was rejoiced, and came back from chambers much earlier. Pocklington Minors (a case of heavy estates in

Chancery, with an application for increased allowance on the part of mother for the education and maintenance of Pocklington Minors) suffered a little in consequence. He had a feast that day, and the generous, fruity port 'ordered' for her was supplemented by a more exhilarating vintage. He was longing for his study and the lamp-light—he told Jenny; and for his faithful, patient secretary to be at her old post.

The faithful secretary, to say the honest truth, did not at all relish the resumption of the duty; she would have preferred the fire in her own room—(she was also 'ordered' this luxury)—with her feet upon the fender—and one of the drawing-room easy-chairs, which had found its way there; for her spine and back joints were delicate, and required care. And there was a pile of M. Bernardi's yellow French 'things,' all of the newest, which had accumulated in her absence.

These were tempting enough: but self-sacrifice (for self, ultimately) was one of Jenny's special features of character. So that night—

even that night of her arrival, fatigued as she was with travel—she went down to work. But there had been provided for her here an easy-chair, very soft and billowy, which received Jenny like the lap of the sea, and a good glowing fire (which he never had for himself); and there stood close by, a flagon of that generous fluid, which had been ‘ordered’ for Jenny, and which would be now useful as a sort of stimulant.

The barrister’s eyes were good enough by this time; but he had got to look placidly on this joint fashion of conducting business. He kept her prisoner there till midnight—over Pocklington Minors. By this time, Jenny actually knew the mechanism of hunting up Cases, and actually was familiar with Measom and Welsby, and their families — with Vesey junior, and all his offsprings—with House of Lords’ cases—with even the old *Invalides* Hospital of Salkeld, Raymond, and such veterans. She could tell the shelf where they resided, and with a spring could lay her nice hand upon their calf shoulders. She was very quick and clever,

our Jenny, when anything had to fall within the purview of her scheme. And so she gradually fell back into the old walk.

But there was a great change remarked in Jenny,—both below, in the charmed kitchen and pantry circles, and even in a slight degree, above. Our Jenny had been on a successful tour, as it were. She had asserted herself, and left her mark. She had been courted and had received admiration. She had stolen upwards into position. Faces had been turned towards hers as to a centre—nay, had looked after hers. Above all, she had fought, not ingloriously, —and so far, she had believed, had conquered.

These things were reflected in her carriage and manner. People in the house felt somehow influenced by the change. She had lost the lowly dependent bearing, and looked forward with calm, straight superiority. She was indeed flushed with triumph, and sometimes wrote in her Diary ; often looked back—how far back now ?

But she knew nothing of anything that might have taken place at Grey Forest since

she left ; and she was growing curious to see the issue. She did not know Mr. Crowle's address ; and she actually thought of writing down to Mr. Wells, the curate, for information about the dear Franklyn family, ' their common friends.' But the day she came to this resolve, she learnt a little more than this ; and this was, about three weeks, or say a month, after quitting Grey Forest.

It was about five o'clock, pretty dark, and Mr. Maxwell had not come home from his chambers. Jenny was in her room, at her fire, supported in the embrace of her chair, with her lower limbs folded comfortably over each other, much in the way gentlemen do ; and by the light of the lamp, was engrossed by a lively thing of Victor Crétin's, in a delicate peach-blossom cover, entitled ' Vous, Moi, et Elle ' (Collection Pasquier). The paper was beautiful, and though there were only a few lines in each page, Jenny found a surprising amount of dramatic action, for such curtailed limits. ' Elle ' (Therèse) was attached with frightful warmth to ' Vous ' (Hector), who did not reciprocate

that passion, but was horribly infatuated by 'Moi' (Marie). Strange to say, by an unhappy complication, 'Elle' and 'Vous' have been secretly and mysteriously united (in a dark place) by the conventional rite, which civilization still tolerates, but neither are conscious of this fatal tie, which is so well known to be a final impediment to all *real* domestic happiness. Some one, well-meaning but foolish, reveals the secret to 'Elle.' She, more well-meaning, yet more foolish, in a moment of confidence, betrays it to 'Vous,' who finds (naturally) his frantic love converted to frantic hate by the sense of this odious tie. 'Va-t-en,' lui dit Hector, avec une sourire amère. 'Je te hais !' A cet accueil froide et cruelle, la misérable tomba à ses genoux, presque évanouie.

Jenny's breath came and went. She held the book high and in a line between her and the chimney-piece. She felt inexpressibly comfortable, and nestled, as it were, in her chair.

She was panting to know what shape the *dénouement* would take, for she was naturally of a romantic turn, and loved to read of all the

turns and-perplexities of what is called 'the gentle passion.' At this critical moment, a voice of earth and sheer prose broke the spell.

'There is a person in the hall, Miss, as wishes to see you.'

Jenny let the peach-coloured tale fall on her lap. 'What brings her at this hour?' she said. 'It is inconvenient.' (She thought it was the dressmaker.)

'I'm sure I don't know, Miss,' said Rachel, not knowing Jenny was thinking of the dressmaker; 'but she wishes to see you particular.'

Jenny said, 'Very well, Rachel; thank you, Rachel'—read a little more of the curious embarrassments of Hector and Marie—got up with a sigh of deep interest, and went down.

The lamp was lighted, and at the end of the hall, by the hall-door, there was standing—not a dressmaker, but a tall, dark figure, craped and veiled all over—a black marble statue. Jenny's instinct told her who it was in a second. She stepped back a little—then ran forward with a delighted cry of recognition.

Charlotte raised her arm, and stopped her.

She spoke in a low, hard voice, unlike the old Charlotte tones.

'Stay—stay there. Don't come nearer—you have done sufficient with your acting——'

Jenny was wondering at the crape and the deep mourning, and did not much heed the speaker.

'Won't you come in and sit down?' she said. 'Dó, dear Charlotte; and let us talk.' And she again offered to go up to Charlotte, in her old affectionate way.

'Keep back,' said Charlotte, with something like terror in her face, and catching the handle of the door—'don't come near me,—MURDERESS!'

Jenny gave a start, perfectly genuine. Charlotte had spoken loudly, and Jenny, with a wisdom that never deserted her, turned round and softly closed a door that was between the two halls.

'What do you mean,' she said, 'by this curious language? You must be going mad?'

Charlotte laughed a hollow laugh. 'More acting! But I have not come to talk with you,

but to *tell* you something. You *are* a murderess, for it was *your* work.'

Sincerely and candidly, Jenny could not understand her. Who was murdered? What *was* the meaning of the black and the crape?

She was not in the least angry at the language. She really thought Charlotte's brain was unsettled.

'Yes,' said Charlotte, with excited voice; 'and you shall not escape. I humbled myself to you,—meanly, I own; but it was for *his* sake. You had no pity, you cold, heartless, cruel, savage creature!'

It was a wise precaution of our Jenny shutting that door, for Charlotte was raising her voice.

Jenny's cheeks were beginning to colour a little. Without being conscious of having done anything, she did not relish being assailed in this personal way.

'But,' said Charlotte, hurriedly, 'you shall not escape. You think me a poor, weak thing, and not a match for you. But I have a will and strength that you little dream of. I am

changed—I am not the same Charlotte. Take care. I warn you.'

The visitors' bell rang outside with a loud clang. Both women started. Charlotte swathed her face in her veil again. She advanced two steps, close up to Jenny, and said to her in a harsh whisper—

'I shall hunt you down yet. There are but two things I live for—to take care of the fatherless, and to——'

The door Jenny had shut so prudently opened suddenly ; and Rachel came to let in master, for it was he who was now returned. Jenny was scared and bewildered. She was frightened by this fierce language ; for though the other had not finished what she was saying, Jenny seemed to understand what she meant.

CHAPTER II.

THE INVALID'S GREETING.

WHEN Mr. Maxwell entered, the dark figure passed quickly into the street.

He saw Jenny in the hall, whose colour was quite gone. 'You look ill,' he said, anxiously. 'What is the matter? Quite cold, too,' he added, taking her hand. 'Come in here—warm yourself. You don't take half enough care, I always tell you.'

It was not until some of the generous fluid she had been 'ordered' had been taken, that Jenny was quite herself again. She hurried to her room as soon as she could. She did not read any more of the entangled amours of 'Vous et Elle,' but lay back in her chair, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, thinking a good deal.

She was really shocked and frightened by the scene. She felt some terror of that infuriated woman. 'She is reckless; she has no command of herself; she will not care how she will injure me, who have never'—Jenny was about to add—'have never injured her,' but stopped. She had quite collected the secret of her mourning, the implied death of Mr. Franklyn, the cause and its effect. The match is off, thought Jenny; there has been a general crash—sale—an ejectment and turn out—and cheap squalid lodgings.

'Ah!' said Jenny, suddenly, standing up and stamping her raised foot, in a fury, 'she is strong, is she? She will hunt me, will she? Let her try it. She has not had the best of it as yet. And to come into this—into *my* hall,' said Jenny, proudly, 'and address her insolent threats to me!' and Jenny walked up and down with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

Later on she became dejected. Jenny was of a timorous nature, and trembled at the notion of the angry Charlotte walking about the world and tracking her. But she thought of

Charlotte's training and of her own strength, and grew reassured. But as to the details—the break up—the ejectment—the sale, &c.—and even that death to which Charlotte alluded—(‘Ah! I have made her feel,’ thought Jenny, ‘as she made me—once’)—she must learn these forthwith; and after a little thought, she sat down, and wrote a soft, kind letter to the Rev. Mr. Wells, begging earnestly for a line as to the dreadful rumours which had reached her about Grey Forest. She had put it into an envelope, and was thinking again of Charlotte—(fear was now added to dislike, and the combination made her regard her enemy with a curious intensity of feeling)—when she recollected something, and opening her letter again, added a postscript: ‘P.S.—Something dreadful must have occurred. I have just seen dear Charlotte, who is very wild and odd. Seriously, I fear her brain is *permanently unsettled*. She talked so incoherently. Do, do, write quickly, dear Mr. Wells.’ Jenny, as she put up her letter again, said to herself, ‘that Wells was a sad gossip.’

That night she got back her equanimity ; and drawing her reading-table quite close (she always read an hour in bed before going to sleep), followed up the loves of Hector and Marie Therèse for nearly a hundred pages. It was growing exciting, for Hector had proposed to the woman, whom he idolized until she became his wife, that she should asphyxiate herself over a charcoal stove. She owed him that *amende*, for the cruel tie which she had innocently fastened on him.

The Curate wrote by return—four pages crowded close—the fourth crossed. He had been wounded, and sorely stricken by the neglect he had suffered latterly : for Jenny, engrossed by the attentions of so many people, had but little time to devote to him. Yet she had adroitly, at a spare moment, contrived to cast him a sweet morsel or two which kept him from utter starvation. A smile—a look of deep meaning—a secret mystery and mutual confidence—sometimes even of being a victim and object of cruel persecution ; still the Curate felt it acutely. But now all was forgotten—for-

given: and he wrote in a tumult of joy and with profusion of details.

The late Mr. Franklyn had committed suicide, his affairs had been left in extreme disorder, creditors' demands were pouring in from all sides, and a sale of the furniture and effects of the family might be looked for with certainty.

Miss Charlotte's match was off finally, and he had it from the best sources that Sir Welbore had said, that after that 'painful business,' it was wholly out of the question. Money might have been got over; but 'a stain' like that—it was wholly out of the question.

Wholly out of the question certainly, with a poor, broken outcast and—ejected family. For they had all left.

It was said, indeed, in the neighbourhood, that the dreadful thing known as an execution might be put in at any moment. Perhaps this was the reason why the family had fled.

The estate and mansion would, it was suspected, be sold eventually, not now, for there were some legal difficulties as to priority, &c.

Sold they would be, however, and it was said among the neighbours that Huxley, the *nouveau riche* of the district, had determined to have it, as the last thing wanting to make him a gentleman, and would give a fourth more than any other. The family were in some London suburb,—in some cheap lodging in some cheap street. He would try and ascertain their address if possible, and let dear Miss Bell know by next post. In short, a full and satisfactory document, which the Curate was a couple of hours writing, and for which, to save the post, it is to be feared he let old Nancy Holden, who was *in extremis*, and who had sent up for him, stand by a little. He, however, saved the post, and reached Nancy's bedside quite time enough to give her a good ten minutes.

Mrs. Maxwell was just about a point between ebb and flow, neither better nor worse; but more querulous, restless, noisy, troublesome than ever. This was the popular voice in the servant world. As she suffered more, she seemed to gather a sort of wakeful strength,

and she was always in motion with tongue and eye, asking questions about all things and persons, and nervously watching the door. Nor was she a person who could be a little awed to keep quiet by a gentle authority, as most sick people can, but when she was seized with a thought or notion, it took hold of her; it devoured her, and forced its way out in a thousand jealous questions,—and could only be laid but by reasonable satisfaction. Then her affliction was developing; a cold sword would be plunged in periodically, and made her shriek and scream with the fierce pain. The distinguished physicians came regularly with decent routine, and accepted their reward in the old guilty, surreptitious way, as though they were so many new conscripts, and were being recruited afresh for the Queen's army every day.

Every one in the house and out of it said that poor Mr. Maxwell was sadly to be pitied, he must have such a time of it, was sorely tried, &c. Every one said, that for herself, after all, it would be a happy release,—a view which often occurs to nearly every friend, but the

person most interested. Men merely said it was a shame—the women saying it was going on too long—was too much of a good thing. The physicians said it was a thing that might go on for years, or ‘go out like that!’ said Sir Charles, imitating a zephyrus with his mouth; and this statement produced a general impression abroad of her being on the whole very unreasonable.

Jenny, out of her charity, took the earliest opportunity to tap at her door and go in to see her. The sick, restless woman, leaning on her hand upon a crushed and crumpled pillow, measured her with bright feverish eyes, that looked as though they never closed. They rarely did, for she had but little sleep. Her little guard, or watch-dog, Jacky, sat beside, and the two measured our Jenny hostilely as she approached.

‘So you have come back, my lady!’—(she sometimes called Jenny this name, fancying it sarcastic,)—“go away, Jacky dear; my lady and I want to have a talk together.’

This was her invariable practice; her sick-

woman's notion of a hint, that it would be a corruption for a child of tender years to hear Jenny's speech. She thought it a deep and cutting stroke. But Jenny only smiled within herself at the poor creature's fatuity.

'So you have come back, my lady,' she said again, 'to take your proper place in the house, eh? *He* gives it to you—insists upon it, so it must be right, eh?'

'Dear madam,' said Jenny, gently, 'you misjudge me sadly; time will help you to take a juster view of these matters.'

'Time!' said the other, with a laugh; 'excellent, quite right: I know you are waiting to see what time will do for you—that is your game, eh?'

'Dearest madam——'

She was getting more excited.

'You expect to tire me out, eh? Time is your game, eh? And you have him to back you, eh? But I shall live,—yes, I *shall* live! I'll *make* myself live if it costs me torture. I hear things—I know things—I——'

She was sitting up, tossing her head wildly, and worked herself into one of her old states of excitement.

‘Hush, hush, dearest madam! Take care. You forget what the physicians—I had better go, indeed I had. But somehow my presence always seems to have the effect of——’

Jenny stole out, and found Jacky coiled up like a dog at the top of the stairs.

She was beginning to dislike this creature—a goad—he was so plainly ranging himself in the opposite camp. She looked at him sourly.

‘You have not said your spelling, sir, for some time,’ she said; ‘come down now.’ And Jenny was laying out in her mind a good page of stiff shingly words, which he should walk over without a stumble, or let him look to it.

‘I must go to mamma,’ he said, obstinately.

‘Not now, sir.’

‘I must,’ said he, drawing away slowly, and keeping his eye on her like a mastiff in retreat, ‘mamma says so.’

Jenny’s cheeks blazed up.

‘Do you dare, sir?’ and she made a step nearer, but he caught the handle of the door.

‘I shall call *her*,’ he said.

Jenny’s fingers were longing to tingle on his ear, but the wretch would scream and cause a scene. So she went down determined to bring the matter before Mr. Maxwell.

CHAPTER III.

JENNY'S EXPEDITION.

ONE of these nights she was well forward in the second volume of 'Vous et Elle,' and getting on, with spurring of her steed, to the close, when her hour came. She was expected below by Mr. Maxwell, in the legal workshop.

The fire was bright, the chair within easy range, the cushions like down; and Jenny's limbs, crossed in her favourite gentlemanly attitude, seemed to enjoy an agreeable lassitude.

With reluctance she rose—even with ill-humour. Another would have made excuse, but Jenny, Sybarite as she was, was too wise to let a mere temporary engagement stand in the way of a greater stake, so she went down in a little ill-humour.

We have mentioned that there was a great change observable in our Jenny of late,—a greater calmness and self-possession. She had lost that little air of creeping she once had ; she was more independent.

So with a sweet air she told him quietly what a sacrifice she was making, and how little she felt disposed for work and labour that night. But she knew there were important duties to be got through—in short, she was Jenny *à la victime*.

He was shocked ; insisted there should be no work. He could do well—for one night it was no matter—and the rest of it. But Jenny was firm, sat at her little table, got her pens, and began with a calm resolution there was no opposing.

But he felt that there was here a great stretch and compliment, and to accept as a special favour what he had hitherto begun to receive almost as a matter of course. But she did a little personal business that night, too.

She again struck the old chord—her painful position in that house, the odium and dislike

that were accumulating on her, and the way the sick woman was treating her. In short, she would be wanting to her self-respect—she owed it to herself and dignity—to not expose herself further to these cruel misconceptions.

‘What, again?’ said he. ‘I thought I had effectually stopped this. Sickness does not give these privileges of calumniating the innocent.’

‘Indeed,’ said Jenny, ‘I had thought now that she was so much better——’

‘Yes,’ said he, reflectively, ‘I *do* think she mends, and is getting stronger every day—so that——’

He felt suddenly that he was saying this in a tone scarcely of rejoicing at the happy change in Mrs. Maxwell’s health. Jenny’s eyes and his met—his were cast down.

‘I will speak to her again. Your position in *this*—in my house, must be regarded. You have laid me under obligations of *gratitude*, which I must not forget, never *shall* forget,’ he added, a little fervently.

‘Still I am not going to turn myself into a

pack-horse,' said Jenny to herself, with a smile, as she resumed 'Vous et Elle,' 'for any of them. It is going on rather too long.' She finished it that night before she went to bed.

So a month and more glided by, happily and peacefully. Jenny wrote many letters and received many, notably many, from her admirer, Mr. Wells. This gentleman furnished her with all details relative to the Franklyn family, and had just sent a choice morsel of news in a hurried postscript that had the air and spasmodic bearing of a telegram. The Franklyn estates were to be sold. The enclosed, a cutting from the local newspaper, to the effect that Mr. Popkins had received instructions to offer for unreserved public competition *all* the rich, rare, and costly furniture, selected by the well-known taste and feeling of the late proprietor, &c. Cards to view would be obtained at Mr. Popkins' establishment.

Everything would be sold, said the auctioneer, with his hand, as it were, on his heart. The old family plate: so many thousand

ounces of silver ; the 'rare' marquetric tables ; the 'rich' buhl cabinets (in truth, these articles were of a character sadly worn and ill-used, and originally of a poor order) ; and even the old portraits—an original Canaletto, 'exquisitely' painted ; a 'choice' Wouvermans, 'from the collection of the late Cardinal Fesch ;' two heads, after Derrer, painted 'with great vigour ;' and a portfolio of rare etchings and engravings. There were also some choice bits of Sèvres and Dresden figures, two 'crackled' china jars, and some other odds and ends. In short, the attention of amateurs, virtuosi, and the cognoscenti generally was respectfully called to this unique opportunity of enriching their collections, which might never occur again.

This was all mere varnish, I am afraid. We have already seen specimens of the thousand ounces of plate in the twisted, spiral-shaped, wiry-looking branch candlesticks which ornamented the dining-table of the late Mr. Franklyn, at the first scene with which this story opened. There was an article

of furniture, too, partially described as a 'massive' sideboard by the same friendly hand, which we have also seen before; but which, with its sharp, spiked legs, seemed a lean and slippered pantaloon of a sideboard.

Jenny read of all these articles, and recognized them; for Mr. Wells, the curate, had good-naturedly forwarded her a copy of the catalogue. The estates, with all the royalties, rights of fishing, hawking, turbary, and general 'easements' thereunto appertaining, were to be 'set up' in London by a grander firm than Mr. Popkins',—Messrs. Saltmarshe, Robins, and Co., whose programmes sometimes covered a large space of ground in the leading journal, closely ranged in file. 'Unless,' it was added, 'disposed of previously by private contract.'

More news, too, concerning the family. Young Craven was considered by the neighbourhood to have behaved 'shabbily;' to have skulked out of his engagements under the paternal Ægis. But it was known at the same time that the Baronet was in his house

as the Autocrat of all the Russias, and would send his son to the mines, or to Siberia,—that is, would disinherit him ruthlessly,—if he dared to gainsay his imperial will. There was much excuse, therefore, for the young man; since he, as the saying is, could not help himself.

Another three weeks:—Mrs. Maxwell, still endued with an unnatural vitality, beginning to eat with a curious appetite; and yet, in that heart direction, much the same. Some ligament or string was getting finer and finer every day, and would snap some morning. Still the day nor hour not known.

Jenny beginning to find this life a little languid, after her late excitement, and growing almost feverish in her wish for news of the Franklyn family. The Curate wrote; they were in London somewhere; still in an obscure suburb, but could not name it. He said it seemed to be made a mystery of.

Jenny was not pleased; a new idea had occurred to her. She wrote him what might be called a lonely letter, in low spirits, as it were; no friends—cast adrift in the vast

London world—with no one but him to lean upon. He very often came up, she was given to understand—passed through (where had our Jenny learnt this?)—would he give her a call, as he had done *once*. It would be a charity, as she wanted him to help her a little, in one respect.

What was the result? Enraptured Curate scrapes together his little money—borrows more from a parishioner, and flies up to Babylon by the night's train. It was his sermon day on the next Sunday, and this was Saturday. But he wrote a hasty note to his superior, excusing himself.

He was in Chesterfield Street the next day. Jenny saw him in Mr. Maxwell's study—saw him for nearly an hour. She was delightful, and he was enraptured.

How long would he stay? Only a day or two? Jenny's face fell.

She had hoped—but no matter—it could not be helped.

Enraptured Curate will stay any number of days—weeks—months if necessary.

He had got traces of the Franklyns, very cleverly, and would work it all out. Return to-morrow.

He returned on the morrow. The poor wretch had been about half the night in a drenching rain. He had heard of some line of country called Little Grosvenor Villas; and, as he could not afford cabs, he had gone exploring until near one o'clock in the morning; splashing and paddling in mud and dirt, rain, and general misery. There were many Little Grosvenor Villas, all at opposite quarters; and the poor ordained tramp had a wretched time, but found it at last by diligent inquiry at a small grocer's shop.

He came the next day to Jenny, husky and coughing,—his throat lined with files,—but triumphant.

'I have found them,' he said.

Jenny's face lightened with joy, and her hands moved instinctively under her chin, as though she were tying the strings of her bonnet.

He came back in the evening by appoint-

ment, and Jenny, already dressed, went out with him.

Little Grosvenor Villas was miles—literally miles—away. Jenny was no tramp, so Curate calls a cab. ‘A Hansom!’ murmurs Jenny; and they get in and roll away. Hansom bounds and springs along with the easy motion of a cricket-ball. Poor Curate! he is silent for a time, thinking how this jaunt will consume such little silver as he has.

It takes them an hour—through the City—through blocked streets—with ten minutes of patient waiting, at a time. Jenny is pleasant and amusing on her journey, lolling back, with Turkish ease, and says she could live in a Hansom.

At last they are set down in the district. Curate is fumbling for his little silver; but Jenny says, sweetly, ‘Let him wait. Pay him now, dear Mr. Wells—but let him wait. But stay—’ and she made as though she would take out her purse; at which the Curate, in eager protest, poured out his silver desperately into Hansom’s hand, and walked away with Jenny.



They found the house—lodgings—mean gentility lodgings—clean, but reduced. The house had the same air of secret suffering under respectable clothing, that a reduced person—say a lady turned governess—has under a genteel suit of apparel. It was small and contracted.

Jenny drew near cautiously, and stood before the hall-door. It was growing dark, and they were lighting the street lamps. She looked up to the first-floor windows. There were no blinds; then she crossed over with the Curate, and stood on the opposite flagging to get a better view.

She could see into the drawing-room, for there were candles lit, and she could make out black figures sitting hopeless at the fire. Jenny looked very long, and never answered her companion when he spoke to her.

‘We ought to go in,’ he said; ‘poor things, they would take it as a charity.’

‘Would she?’ said Jenny, coldly; she did not say ‘they.’ ‘We haven’t time, we must get back; let us find out the number.’ And

she crossed the street again, and went up to the little door—Ten was the number.

As they were turning away, the door suddenly opened, and some one came out. Jenny hastily walked on, but the gentleman followed them a little way, and then, as it were satisfied, turned away in a secret manner down another street. Jenny, deeply veiled, said softly to her friend, 'He knows us; it is young Mr. Craven. How stupid! he will tell them.'

Jenny was really provoked, and said this a little testily, and, by a tone in her words, seemed to convey that it was his fault. Here was the Hansom waiting, and Jenny's sweet voice came back to her. She enjoyed her ride, so 'Make him drive fast, dear Mr. Wells,' said she. 'Isn't the motion delightful?' And the driver aloft scourged his beast with his long whip. At the top of the street, Jenny stopped it, and tripped out. 'She was *so* obliged. Oh, *could* he come again some other time? It was *such* a treat to her. She was *so* lonely. He must come to Chesterfield Street. He should know Mr. Maxwell—would he dine with them some day? No, no,'

added Jenny, dismissing the idea sorrowfully, 'it would be no use asking you ; we won't mention *that* again,' added Jenny, with meaning, as though there was some old legend or history which effectually barred Mr. Wells being asked to a family meal.

She left him to adjust the fare with the Hansom driver, who, seeing that he had to do with a soft-minded clergyman, played the bravo and bludgeon man. He got down fiercely, when the Curate mildly demurred. 'What, do you suppose I'm to be distressin' my 'oss for you and your young 'oman, all for this? You ought to be ashamed on yourself to offer it.' Becoming more furious, our Curate gave way, and presented him with a very large testimonial. Poor soul! he would make it up by a slender repast—a ghostly dinner at a counter—a fiction of a dinner, whose proper name was lunch.

Jenny seemed to be sadly disturbed by this visit. At home she sat long before the fire ruminating, and beat her foot impatiently. She had thought all was over with that Craven alliance ;

and here was this manly youth, under cover of night, and, no doubt in defiance of his family, skulking away to see the impoverished family and their pauper house. Were Jenny older and more mature she might have thought it her painful duty to put his relations on their guard. But to do her justice she did not entertain the notion a moment. Perhaps it was because something else occurred to her.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERVIEW.

JENNY had made a few friends for herself in this vast lonely, lonely London. Among others she had attracted the notice of the Reverend Hewlett Pole, M.A., vicar of the parish church which Jenny frequented. This gentleman was struck by her devout bearing on Sundays, and the beautiful 'abstraction,' as he called it, which characterized her manner of devotion. He knew something of Mr. Maxwell, and hoped that she would 'assist them' with the catechism and other parochial matters. The Reverend Hewlett had, indeed, a sort of private legion of parish virgins under his command, whom he was fond of 'training,' and he promptly enlisted Jenny.

The work, I am afraid, was scarcely suited to one of Jenny's temperament. She had been in the habit of devoting her Sabbaths to strict retirement in her chamber; for on Saturdays, usually, came home one of M. Bernardi's delightful boxes. A Sunday or two she *did* go and parade at the Reverend Hewlett Pole's morning drill; but it did not suit. She told her clerical colonel very gently and plaintively that she was afraid she could not come very often, and when pressed by that officer, hinted that the ladies of the regiment made her feel uncomfortable. Perhaps they did. And the statement was, in fact, true; for during the exercises Jenny *did* feel uncomfortable.

Mr. Maxwell knew of it, and approved of her going; but Jenny, when she had suspended her duties, did not care to mention it to him. She therefore went out every Festival very much about the old hour—as if to the old place. At dinner, sometimes, Mr. Maxwell asked her how she had got on—a question she either did not hear, through a fit of coughing, or through a sudden question of her own occurring to her; or

if these two resources failed her, by a sweet and mournful shaking of her head, and a sudden change of subject. This mode of reply often mystified Mr. Maxwell, who used to translate it into something unpleasant having occurred, which it would be too painful to dwell upon further.

On many little expeditions therefore went Jenny, even on week-days, which were understood to have reference to the Rev. H. Pole, and his parish business. Jenny tripped away lightly, at all hours deeply veiled and alone, and was often looked long after wistfully by predatory gentlemen as she floated by them. On the morning after her little expedition with Mr. Wells, she went out betimes, that is, between eleven and twelve, stepped briskly across the park, got into St. James's Street, and fluttered about the region found at the bottom of that settlement of clubs. She looked at those stately buildings with wonder and curiosity. For she had heard young Craven describe their interior state and splendour, and more specially dwell on the private magnificence of his own,

the Junior Conservative,—their marbles and mirrors, ottomans and velvets, and smoking-rooms, and cook, M. Salmi, whom the ‘Rag’ had tried to steal from them, by dishonourable private offers. ‘The Rag?’ said Jenny, bewildered, and wished the origin of that curious and rather degrading *sobriquet*, to be explained to her. Explained to her also, was the system of young Craven’s club life. How he had lodgings just by—‘the finest’ in the quarter. ‘Old Venterby wrote from the country, just a day late! Jove! I heard he nearly burst a blood-vessel with rage!’

Jenny thought of this little legend, as she wandered about listlessly. She kept close to a cab-stand, and held her little purse in her hand. Suddenly, and with a little hurry, she accosted a driver of one of these vehicles, and timidly asked the fare to Temple Bar. Curious to say, as she put this question, a gentleman who had been coming along the street, stopped beside her, and called out, ‘Halloo! Miss Bell taking a cab!’

Jenny was near fainting, and dropped her little purse. The youth picked it up.

‘Well, Miss Bell,’ said young Craven, ‘where do you wish to go to?’

‘Oh, it’s no matter now,’ said Jenny, hurriedly—she was quite scared, poor child! ‘I must go home—good-bye, Mr. Craven!’ and Jenny began to move.

‘*Must* you go?’ said he. ‘Very well—glad to have seen you. I have not breakfasted yet.’

His manner was cold, and Jenny said within herself, that *something* had changed him. She bit her lip, and walked away hastily, and without turning her head. Her cheek flushed, and she spoke to herself, as she walked fast. As she turned into the park, she heard footsteps behind her, as of some one running:—young Craven was beside her.

‘I—I—wanted to ask you,’ he said,—‘it is so curious not having seen you for so long—how you have been,—what has become of you?’

Jenny looked round, with mystery and alarm, as though they were engaged in a deed of guilt.

‘Oh, Mr. Craven——’ she said.

He looked round also. ‘Well!’ he said—then went on. ‘I saw you last night,’ he said, ‘though you didn’t see me. I was seeing that poor family, and that brave girl Charlotte.’

He looked steadily at Jenny. Jenny cast down her eyes.

‘Poor—poor girl!’ she said. ‘Though she does hate me!’

He gave a curious smile. ‘I believe,’ he said, ‘on the contrary——’

‘Do not let us speak of it,’ said Jenny, with growing agitation. ‘I shall never forget it—that scene—that terrible scene!’

‘Scene!—what scene?’

‘Oh, she told you,’ said Jenny, nervously—‘of course she did. She tells *you* everything. It shattered my nerves dreadfully. Let us speak of something else—quickly now—’

‘No; but tell me,’ he said: ‘have you seen Charlotte?’

‘She came to our house,’ said Jenny, in a low trembling voice, ‘and there—sent up for me, and in the hall—our own hall—*assailed* me,

oh, so cruelly—so grossly—so unjustly. Oh! oh!’ said Jenny, trying with her round hand to shut out the picture. ‘But I should make allowance. I think she knew not what she was doing.’

‘I never heard of this,’ said young Craven, musingly.

‘She thought,’ said Jenny, excitedly, ‘that I was, in some remote way—that seemed to be the delusion—the cause of dear darling Mr. Franklyn’s end—my kind friend—my best benefactor!’ And Jenny lifted up her eyes devoutly to heaven. ‘But,’ she added, sweetly, ‘you always said so—you found it out, I don’t know now, the first day—I did not believe you. I confess it now—I did not know of your penetration. You told me—you warned me!’

‘Well,’ said he, complacently, ‘I thought I saw some little prejudice against you.’

‘Oh, had I taken your advice in other things. But no matter now.’ (What was this precious counsel given by young Craven?) ‘I have no one here in vast weary London to counsel or direct me. Happy those who have. Happy

those who are spared the cruel stroke of secret slander. Yes,' said Jenny, vehemently, 'she has slandered me to you. You know she has. She has repeated those vile things. I am no hypocrite. I do *not like* her. I can see that she has turned *you* against me. Naturally *you* trust her. You are guided by her; why not? She is to be your bride. But I am no hypocrite, and cannot forgive her.'

All this Jenny poured out in a vehement stream of mingled agitation, and at the end even of hysterical sobs.

'Don't, don't,' said young Craven, looking round. 'I assure you, you are mistaken, you are indeed. You take this matter far too seriously. I am in the habit, as *you* know,' he added with pride, 'of judging for myself. I don't take my opinions second-hand.'

'Good-bye,' said Jenny, hurriedly, 'I must go. I *dare* not wait. Good-bye. I shall not see you again, for years perhaps. But if I thought you had so base an opinion——'

'I assure you,' said he, 'it is quite a delusion on your part. But tell me, where do you——?'

‘I must go, I must go,’ said Jenny, releasing herself. They were close to the Park gate now. ‘Only tell me this. If ever—if ever—I have *no* friends, you know — if ever I should want a *little* advice, to direct me in an emergency — *may* I — *may* I — just write, and—could you spare me one line? It would be *so* precious.’

‘Good gracious, yes,’ said young Craven, impetuously, ‘to be sure. But I shall see you again before long. Tell me, where do you——?’

‘Hush, hush,’ said Jenny, ‘I dare not. And promise me this—if I *may* exact a little promise—I shall not see you again——’

‘Certainly,’ said young Craven; ‘but good gracious, I tell you I shall.’

‘Promise me not to speak of me to *her*. It somehow degrades me. I can’t bear to think of it after the dreadful scene—now good-bye. Thanks!’

And Jenny fluttered away.

Young Craven stood looking after her till she had crossed the street and turned out of Piccadilly. He then looked round him, hesi-

tated a moment, and followed cautiously. Jenny could not see.

But she could not see also some one that was running home before her, a little boy, who suddenly turned down by the Mews behind Chesterfield Street, and got into Mr. Maxwell's house by the stables.

When Jenny entered, she was met at the door by her maid Rachel.

'O Miss! O Miss!' said that attendant, 'such a business. Master was looking for you everywhere.'

Jenny was perturbed.

'What is it, Rachel? anything happened?'

'Didn't you hear, Miss—not expected to live out the day?'

'What! what!' said Jenny hastily, a curious light coming into her eyes. 'I must go up.'

'No, no, it's master's father, Miss. He was telegraphed for this morning, and is gone away half-an-hour ago; just caught the train.'

Stupid maid! and yet it was not her fault. Jenny was in a flutter. She presently was told more particulars, and found a little hasty

note directed to her by Mr. Maxwell. His father, a man nearly eighty years old, was *in extremis*. In the course of nature, he could not be expected to last more than a few days. He hoped she would take care of herself during his absence, and deny herself nothing. He would telegraph to her any news.

That very night at ten o'clock, when she was thinking of retiring to rest, a telegram came. All was over. At seven o'clock the old man had expired, and the sender of the message was now Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., Bart., and the sick lady upstairs was Lady Maxwell.

Jenny looked at the characters with additional interest and reverence. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed up, and she began to pace the room, as she always did when she was castle-building. She did not go to bed for an hour later, and when she did, it was with a pleasant smile on her lips. Her dreams were very light that night.

CHAPTER V.

‘ADVICE AND OPINION.’

NEXT day, towards evening, returned Sir Frederick Maxwell, Bart. He had a ‘heavy’ Case, which he dare not neglect, for any filial or mortuary duties, and had arranged to go back for the funeral. That ceremonial took place in due course, and with befitting state, down at Brighton, where the old Baronet had died. It was conducted with a weight of crape, and abundance of odious sweeping brushes, disguised in black, and the scorbutic mourning mutes, which decency and grief insist on. Thus matters fell into the old channel, and Sir Frederick, who made no pretence of deep grief, was at his law labours again.

Jenny, it was noted by Rachel the maid

and others, seemed to be more assiduous than usual after the ministrations of the Reverend Hewlett Pole; going up, as it was believed, every second or third day in that parochial direction. She took the Park road, but generally strayed off a little down in the direction of the palace, and which was indeed the road that led towards the Rev. H. Pole's district. Somewhere in this direction she found her field of missionary labour, performed it, whatever it was, and returned home. The time selected was usually in the grey of the winter evening, between four and five o'clock. And curious to say, almost always a young boy took advantage of her absence to steal out by the back of Chesterfield Street, by the Mews, and was home always a few minutes before her.

Jenny was not so diligent in her legal clerkship as of old. Her master's eyes had mended prodigiously, and he was growing strong. Still he insisted on her old service in the study, and Jenny's protestations were overruled. The old form of having one of the children down as watch-dog was jealously insisted on by Jenny.

at least up to ten o'clock at night, after which hour the formula was dispensed with, and her scruples seemed satisfied; she called it, however, 'the Drawing Room'—a characteristic little *salvo*, and it quieted Jenny's conscience.

But it has been mentioned that Jenny had grown more independent and composed in her manner. She and Sir Frederick Maxwell very often suspended legal labour altogether for an hour, and the man of law took counsel of the girl of sense. She gave it cheerfully and with surprising wisdom. He said she had more sense than half the fellows at 'the Bar.' There was Boljoye, a Queen's counsel, with a bag distended as was his own person; and Boshley, and Rasher, who had got, Heaven knows how, to be a serjeant. 'I declare, Jenny,' said he—he had come to call her Jenny—'I would sooner have your view than the whole of theirs put together.'

There was no affectation of grief for the old baronet. Within a week the new one was talking him over with Jenny in his study.

'He left us very little,' he said; 'he had not much to leave, though. Ten thousand will be the outside. You know, though we are baronets, we are landless—not a rood. My poor father was sold out forty years ago. That is the reason I am here in this study with these papers before me.'

Jenny sighed.

'By the way, you must advise me with that long, sensible, little head of yours. How much do you suppose I have put by? I tell you everything, you know.'

Jenny smiled, but could not tell—could not even dream—could not guess.

'Well, say eight thousand pounds.' This was said with great hesitation, as if fearful of offending.

Mr. Maxwell laughed.

'You must think me a very poor young man,' he said, 'not to have more to show than that. No. I have laboured hard and spent little. The house costs next to nothing, thanks to the thrifty mistress—I mean house-keeper.' (Jenny confused at this mistake.)

‘No; what would you say to five-and-twenty thousand?’

Jenny gave a little scream; it *really* took her by surprise.

‘What a *deal* of money!’ she said, artlessly.

‘Oh dear, what a deal!’

‘Now,’ he said, ‘the question is, what is to be done with it? It has been resting in the funds long enough. I’ll not wait any longer to add more to it. What do you say? Case for Miss Bell’s advice and opinion! Fee, a new shawl. What do you say to a new India shawl?’

Jenny took no notice, but began to reflect. She took up a stray roll of briefs and wrote on its face carelessly, then handed it over to him.

He read,—‘*Buy an estate.*’

‘Excellent,’ said he. ‘Rasher often gets twenty guineas for a worse opinion.’

‘For, say forty thousand pounds,’ said Jenny, with an air of quiet reflection, ‘a fair bit of land could be got. An old baronetcy and no land is a gentleman without a coat. It is incomplete,’ said Jenny; ‘it has no root.’

'No settlement, as we say in the law. Excellent! I'll do it.'

'You can add to it as you get more money. Buy bits here, and bits there, as the fees increase, then get into Parliament; no barrister is in full practice unless he is retained by a constituency.'

'Good,' said he, stopping before her and taking her hand. 'You are a very clever creature, Jenny,' (Jenny released herself hastily.) 'I have made up my mind; it shall be. We shall buy our land; we shall look out for a suitable thing; we shall go down; we shall build there; you shall choose the furniture; you shall choose the county, the town, everything; you shall——' Suddenly he stopped.

Jenny rose up.

'It is time to say good night,' she said, and fluttered away like a dove to her nest.

Next morning, when the Barrister was gone to court, a clergyman, who had been skulking suspiciously about the street, came up, and asked to see Miss Bell—'Please say, the Rev. Charlton Wells.' He was shown into the

‘drawing-room,’ and Jenny came down to him. She was sweet and affectionate.

‘You have news for me, I know,’ she said, with simplicity. ‘You have heard something more about them. Dear Mr. Wells, you are so kind—so good-natured.’

He was gratified with these praises—the poor clerical jackal!—and proceeded with complacency to tell his story. He had seen the girls yesterday—Charlotte was out. They were delighted, poor things! and were very open and confiding. Charlotte, they told him, had great hopes that something was going to happen. Old Cousin John Hall had written kindly, and would soon be coming over. They had got a benevolent man of law, who was looking into their affairs, and would try to set them straight; and Charles—dear Charles—

Jenny started from her seat.

‘Does *he* go much to them?’ she asked, with a curl upon her lip.

He had been there only the evening before. He had told them, he was sure, in *time* Sir Welbore would come round—that is, in time.

Jenny beat her foot upon the ground, and did not speak; then got up and began to pace the room, according to her favourite habit.

'You—you told me,' she said, a little tartly, 'that it was all at an end for ever. How could you have made such a mistake? You see there is nobody I can depend on—not one—all the same!'

The Curate was confounded at this attack. 'I thought,' he faltered, 'you would be delighted. Your friend, you know—and——'

Jenny laughed. 'Of course—of course,' she said, 'we understand that. But I am very much harassed on all sides. Dear Mr. Wells, forgive me. You who are so good, so generous, so useful to me.'

The poor jackal took her hand reverently, and bent his glowing cheek over it. He was overcome by these praises. Jenny dismissed him, for she had a little scheme in her restless head she wanted to carry out forthwith. But mind—he must come and see her again.

Poor jackal! His money was gone, and he

was in debt for lodgings. He had made a faint resolve to rush home on the morrow, for his superior was calling for him imperiously, but he now must stay.

CHAPTER VI.

• THE FRANKLYNS' PROBATION.

THE poor outcast Franklyns—in all the misery of grief and straitened means combined—were wretched enough in their mean lodgings in the London suburbs. Grief makes no account of surrounding luxury; the softest pillows, to moisten with tears, and the most delicate and soothing ministrations—these are about as little regarded as the gilding and mirrors of a transatlantic steamer in the agonies of sea-sickness. And yet take these comforts away, and how much the bitterness of private sorrow is intensified. And this is the special misery that generally waits upon a father's loss: for, usually accompanying the natural grief, comes a crowd of sad troubles—a general up-

rooting—a rush of demands, and possibly a sudden bursting out of a whole conflagration of difficulties and dangers, smouldering for years, and which the skilful hand, now motionless, was alone able to control.

In their little lodging, and with a little purse, which was running out as steadily and inevitably as sands in an hour-glass, were the Franklyns, miserable together. They were about as wretched as they could well be. Over them hung the memory of the late dreadful act, like a mephitic exhalation—that dreadful end which, not many years before, would have been marked for public reprobation by a stake, and bed of quicklime, at cross-roads. They had no hope. Their dear loved Grey Forest was to be sold—sold, with all the attendant roughness to be expected from men who knew that it could not meet their just demands. These poor girls themselves had to come in contact with rude surly men of law, and with, to them, the dreadful courtesies of sheriffs' men, and demoralized executives of the civil power. There was no one to help them. Their brother had



been long in some foreign settlement, and would not hear the news for a month to come. Mr. Crowle, the late man of business to the family, Charlotte had dismissed, with a shudder. She had a dim impression that he was some way associated with the late catastrophe, and could not endure his presence. He had suddenly cast his smooth, glistening skin, and assumed a new manner of insolence. But Charlotte did not fear him. Still, he was a large creditor of the late Mr. Franklyn.

Every one knew that the Craven alliance was now at an end: that Sir Welbore had solemnly and decidedly pronounced that 'the thing could not be—was out of the question—was—er—most inconvenient—but, still, not to be thought of. There was something—er—really—so *unpleasant* in that—er—affair—of the late Mr. Franklyn's. No—it could not even be thought of. And so,' said the Baronet to his son, 'you will be good enough to—er—wipe the whole thing out of your mind.'

That son was of a curious temper. He had a kind of chivalrous sense in him, which I

believe came of reading modern novels; and, just as he could write fine adoration 'To Ianthe' and 'To Medora,' there was sometimes a poetic chord touched among the motives which directed his actions. And thus the idea of he—the brave, gallant Squire Craven, standing by that gentle, stricken girl in her distress—soothing and comforting her, in despite of all the menaces of a despotic father, seemed something noble; indeed, it quite filled the mind of that brave knight. And so he paid them conspirator-like visits, and was really kind and enthusiastic, and helped them in many ways.

Charlotte was a firm woman; she knew the dangers and difficulties, the hopeless obstacles, and plainly told him it was all at an end. He was distracted for the time being, and thought himself miserable: but was very happy. That little tendency towards our Jenny was but a spasm, as indeed was his present emotion. And it is to be suspected Charlotte had this impression. And indeed, it may be said, that although she liked him with but a mild and subdued regard, and in a great measure inclined to him



but for the sake of her family, his was a mind, as has been seen, infinitely below hers.

On Charlotte's brain rested the whole burden. They had now a little store of money, but that would be soon washed away. She wrote to the 'Cousin Hall,' at Dieppe, who had spoken so generously, telling him of their state—wrote, it must be said, with repugnance, but she was making many more bitter sacrifices, and told him of their state. But it would seem that the news of their misfortune had damped his sympathies—an effect not uncommon with such news—and he never answered. An old bachelor, fond of comforts, he had of course naturally reckoned on the arm-chairs and firesides of Grey Forest—on the gardens and glades of Grey Forest—on the old wines of Grey Forest—and not on the meagre accommodation of small hired lodgings. This was but human nature, and human nature sent no answer, and perhaps changed its mind.

Charlotte thought of the old universal plank in woman's shipwreck—the genteel spar the suddenly distressed girl clings to—taking office

as a governess. The delusion is, that no qualifications are required, save having possibly been *under* a governess. Any gentle girl, who can dress neatly, write a little pale, neat hand, do a little German, a little French, and much piano—here are all the qualifications. Any one can teach. The old infatuation goes on, and when the family in sad solemn council have debated, and with tears and much grief have determined that one at least—not more—shall be sacrificed to this cruel trade, the whole is considered as accomplished.

Charlotte, with far better qualifications than many of her kind—and who would really have grown into an admirable teacher—turned her mind seriously to this plan. Poor child! What a world of flutter and anxiety she made of these little rooms! For she went through the old procedure—a little squeezed and wrung from daily wants, and expended in advertising. Advertising in the great leading journal, who huddled away her modest statement of her qualifications among a whole mob of such things in the great Champs de Mars of the



Supplement. It brought her no profit; she was lost, swallowed up—but they watched the post anxiously. Charlotte tried again: couched it—much against her will—in a more dramatic shape, and received two proposals: one, no salary, but board; to find herself in washing, &c.; scrupulously clean; attend family prayers:—after a few years (possibly, when the education was finished) a salary might be thought of. The other was wholly unsuited. Poor Charlotte!

She struggled on, however, and the severest struggle of all was the shamming of hope and cheerfulness for the sake of her sisters. But her heart was sinking, for she absolutely saw *no* issue. She wrote again to Cousin Hall—and again there came no answer. She looked at her little purse, and saw the yellow waters oozing away slowly. That little well would be dry in another week. Add to this, she had a dreadful presentiment that she was going to be ill. For, at times she felt strange shiverings, and an odd sense about her head. This thought filled her with alarm, and then, only then, did

her spirits really sink, for an illness would indeed be her final crushing blow. So, desperately and in despair, she, as it were, scourged all such symptoms away, and refused to entertain them. But it was no use.

She had given up the advertising, and had taken to walking over London. She had consulted those strange offices where they send home such things as teachers to order, as other shops do other articles—and furnished with references, had been calling at houses, and walking miles in dirt—very often in rain. That is, coming back; for on going, it would have interfered with a genteel appearance. These things repeat themselves over and over again—and will repeat themselves to the end. We know how she fared about as well as though she came in and sat down and told the whole story: the story of the timid knock, the suspicious servant, the gentle voice trembling as it states its ‘business,’ the interrogation in the drawing-room, and the ‘sorry it won’t do,’ and final retreat down stairs in the humiliation of repulse. Charlotte went through all this until her sense of shame

became blunted, and came home every evening wet, sinking, beaten, hopeless, and despairing.

Worse than all—she was growing ill—the symptoms would not be scourged away. Worse than all—she was losing heart and vigour to repel them, and finally one evening gave in utterly—became formally ill. A sort of low heat or fever which she said only required a little rest, and upon the sofa she proceeded to take that rest.

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPARITION.

THAT evening, at the other side of London, when Jenny went down to her work, she found Sir Frederick Maxwell looking into a tin box of papers that had just arrived 'for advice and opinion.'

'Here is something that will interest you,' he said. 'You will be sorry to see these. Here are the Franklyn mortgages which a creditor's solicitor has sent me to look over.'

Jenny sighed and looked sad.

'I knew,' he said, 'you would be grieved, but what can we do? We are mere workmen, and must take every "job" that is offered to us.'

'Oh,' said Jenny, 'how dreadful; and—

what are you to do with these?' she asked, curiously.

'Why, it seems,' he said, 'that the place is to be sold.'

'Sold!' said Jenny in despair.

'Yes; and when an estate is to be sold, in rush the creditors from the east and west, and struggle who shall be first—legally, I mean. This fellow is a mortgagee, and wishes to be first; and when I say fellow, I believe it is some widow in France.'

He then sat down and began to go over the papers, and Jenny, who had proclaimed that she was 'suffering' (in some direction not distinctly announced), drew her chair close to the fire, looked at the coals and thought—thought deeply. Many shades of expression passed over her face, and a dozen sarcastic phrases seemed to have been uttered by her lips. Those had a language of their own. The Baronet, who at first looked over at her now and again, gradually got absorbed in his work.

What was Jenny busy with? Was she doing battle—moral—with a secret enemy? Was

she crushing that secret enemy, or being flung back in her turn? Now hoping, now despairing; now triumphant, now defeated. There was, indeed, a desponding expression in her face, and perhaps she thought she was far away from victory. But she loved excitement, and, above all, the excitement of a battle.

‘Very strange, and really most curious!’ came from the study table, of which Jenny took no notice, being busy with her conflict, and taking it as some exciting light on, say the theory of remainders. There was an interval of a quarter of an hour more. The barrister was flinging over the stiff crackling parchment sheets hastily, taking a compendious view of it all. He then stood up.

‘It is so—exactly what I thought! What do you say to this, Jenny?’

Jenny looked round.

‘There has been some strange work here,’ he said. ‘I hope it won’t do harm to your friends, but there is something very queer about these papers. Some of these deeds seem to be manufactured.’

Jenny gave a cry—of surprise perhaps.

‘Manufactured?’ she said.

‘Manufactured, or spoliated, or forged,’ said he. ‘It is an ugly word. Tell me,’ continued he, ‘your friend, Mr. Franklyn, was in difficulties before his death, was he not?’

‘Oh yes—yes,’ said Jenny, mournfully, ‘all his life.’

‘Ah—thought so—always raising money.’

‘Always, always,’ said Jenny, still sadly.

‘Found it hard to get latterly, I suppose.’

‘Exactly,’ said Jenny; ‘in fact *could* not get it.’

‘Oh, it is quite plain. I am afraid I see the whole thing. He must have had some old deeds by him, and got some friendly person who did not care about the exact legal part of the transaction to lend him the money on the security of these old papers. See, Jenny,’ he added, opening one out, ‘these sheets in the middle are mere sheets taken at random; they don’t even follow; and he had the first pages engrossed freshly—a most clumsy thing altogether.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Jenny, ‘I recollect now—perfectly,’ and she *did* recollect the bundle of clean deeds with the blank spaces she had lighted on the day they were turning over the papers at Grey Forest.

‘What do you recollect, Jenny?’ said the barrister, with interest.

‘So clever! such an instinct!’ said Jenny, as though the praise escaped her; and with difficulty the story was wrung from her.

‘It just confirms my view,’ said he. ‘The wretched man was driven to extremity, and then ventured on this rash step. Possibly it was the fear of detection drove him to his fatal act.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Jenny, ‘how dreadful! And his poor family!’

‘Yes, and the poor—widow I think she is described,’ said she, looking at the back of the deed—‘Hannah Martin, who advanced her three thousand pounds on that worthless security. That is very dreadful too, dear Jenny.’

Jenny was *accablée*—prostrated—at the image of the widow.

‘And the person whose name has been used,’ he went on—‘let me see—Long——Colonel Long, of Barrow Hall, Northamptonshire, and now living at Avignon, France. He took care to lay the venue,’ said the barrister, using the phrase of his profession, ‘a long way off—the poor miserable man. Well, it must all come out now.’

Jenny gave a spasm and a short cry.

‘I am truly sorry,’ he said, compassionately, ‘as they are your friends. I know you will feel it as acutely as any one of them. I must send for the solicitor—the solicitor of the unfortunate widow—to-morrow.’

Another spasm escaped Jenny.

‘It looks,’ he went on, ‘as if they had some suspicion, or were uneasy about it, by their sending it to me.’

He tossed the papers back into their tin case again, and took up another bundle. He spread it out with the usual barristerial artistic touch, and began to read. But he was absent. He was a quarter of an hour over a page. Jenny was smiling to herself at the fire.

Suddenly he turned round.

‘You have been at Grey Forest,’ he said, ‘and know it well?’

‘The sweetest, loveliest spot in the world! But I shall never see it again,’ said Jenny, hopelessly. ‘Never! Oh, that is all over!’

‘There is no knowing,’ he said, smiling. ‘Now—prepare for a surprise—what would you say to *buying* it—to *our* buying it?’

‘Buying it!’ said Jenny, starting from her chair.

‘Yes,’ he continued, still smiling, ‘absolutely buy it, in fee, with all the rights, easements, and appurtenances. It would just do—would suit *us*, I think, exactly’ (he leant a little on the word *us*). ‘And then I was thinking also, as they were such dear kind friends, this awkward business of the deeds would be staved off, and they would be saved from exposure. I knew it would delight you.’

But Jenny, who had looked delighted at the first part of the plan, became desponding at this second view. She shook her head mournfully. ‘It would not do; there were grave

objections. Such a sacrifice for *her*. Oh, never !’

He became earnest.

‘Yes, Jenny, it must be so. I have taken a fancy to the place. You like it, and I am sure I shall. I dare say it will be got cheap ; and you shall have these horrible deeds handed over to you to bring to your friends, to burn together, and do what you like with.’

Again her face brightened ; this was more feasible.

‘They are to be given to *me*. Oh ! how good ! how kind ! how generous !’

‘Not at all. I would do,’ added he, in a low voice, ‘far more than that for you, and I hope eventually——’

He stopped. Jenny kept her eyes on the ground cautiously, and waited for more, but he did not go on.

‘Yes,’ he continued, ‘we shall all go down to Grey Forest ; build a fine mansion ; shut up this odious workshop ; and be gentlemen and ladies.’

Jenny smiled sadly.

‘You will all be very happy.’

‘We! Yes; and you, too, Jenny.’

‘No, no!’ said Jenny, lifting her eyes, ‘no, no, no!—my path must be in another direction—that Paradise is not for me.’

‘But it shall be for you—it is *all* for you—it is——’

‘All for me?’ said Jenny.

‘Yes, all for you. You shall be queen, and reign at Grey Forest. It shall be your kingdom. Truly, it is no sin to lay out a little happiness for ourselves at one time of our lives. *You* know what mine has been—what a slave’s life. In bondage to this master’ (touching some law books), ‘and to——’

He pointed up. Did Jenny understand him? But she never lifted her eyes.

‘Why should I conceal it? Surely that poor, delicate, ailing woman upstairs, who has lain all her life at the very edge of a grave—*she* has not been a wife to me. Is it so wicked to look forward to a time when she shall be released from a tie that has been misery to her and wretchedness to me? I have borne

it patiently. I have never risen up against the yoke. Even now I can wait, and look forward, as I ask you to do, Jenny, that is'—and he paused—'if you have—if you can feel as—'

Jenny was scared, fluttered, frightened, as she heard this disclosure. He, too, was agitated, and was waiting for her to speak.

Jenny's voice took the shape of a murmur, rather than of words. Just at that moment the door opened suddenly, and a strange, ghastly-looking figure, with a light in its hand, stood in the doorway motionless.

She was wrapped in a shawl. Her hair was disordered, and her eyes had a strange light in them. Her lips and cheeks were moving in spasms, as if she was trying to speak. The pair trembled before her.

She lifted her long, wasted arm, wrapped in the shawl's fold, and it fell again to her side.

'I have heard you,' she said at last, 'I have been listening—I have heard it all. *This* is your plan—is it?' and the wretched lady, who seemed as if she were wrapped in grave clothes instead of a shawl, looked from

one to the other, with wild eyes, and a chest that sank and heaved with strange rapidity. 'This is your plan!' she repeated, in a key that rose steadily—'*her* scheme too!—But I know it—I know it.'

The two had not courage to say a word. They were trembling.

'So you were settling it all together! Which of you was to do the work? Oh, Heaven help me—at your mercy here—miserable creature that I am! But I shall never sleep—never! I shall watch all night long; and if you come—if *she* comes, I shall scream, and rouse the whole city.'

She was, indeed, doing that at the moment; and the barrister, recovering himself a little, made a step forward—

'Come, come,' he said, gently, 'you are exciting yourself; it is dangerous, you know. Do go up again, dear—do——'

She laughed.

'*Do*, dear,' she repeated, 'and—leave *her*.'

As she pointed, Jenny shrank away in real terror.

‘Look at her!’ said she, advancing on her — ‘an artful, designing, false, deadly jade. *I* know her. *I* have heard about her. *I* have people that care about me, and tell me things. Come to my room, you poor deluded soul, and I will tell you things about *her*. Why, you don’t know that *she’s*——’

Jenny, visibly alarmed, turned to the Baronet.

‘Oh! sir, this is dreadful—the poor lady! Shall I ring?’

‘Shall she ring!’ shrieked the sick woman. ‘Do you hear her? Does she *dare* to give orders in *my* house? Shall she ring for *her* servants—ha! ha!—to drag the wretched, miserable Lady Maxwell upstairs? Oh! oh! I have come to this!’ And she burst into a flood of tears and hysterical sobs, under cover of which Jenny *did* ring the bell.

Jenny was trembling, though, like an aspen leaf; she looked cowed and guilty. Suddenly the other began to shriek, and caught her side. It was a fit of spasms in the fatal heart direction. It nearly brought her to the ground.

She was lifting herself in agony—striving upwards, as if to escape it. But women and men servants, some of whom had indeed been nearer than was supposed, came crowding in; and the unfortunate lady, now helpless, was removed gently upstairs. Jenny followed, and passed to her own room. It was a painful and disagreeable scene, and had best be forgotten by all sides.

The eminent physician was sent for hurriedly—came—and said it was a bad business, and a miracle how she had survived it. It was the old story—a soothing and composing elixir; and ‘we must be cautious, my dear sir—a breath! you understand.’ And, as usual, the physician illustrated his meaning by making himself into a temporary *Æolus*; then passed through a painful pecuniary probation, and went his way.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APPOINTMENT.

JENNY'S nerves were in a strange flutter. She had so trained herself to the pleasant swards of life, that any rough, stony places completely unhinged her. Every pulse was quivering. She was even a little terrified. But presently she got composed, and a feeling came uppermost of bitter anger at the outrageous language that had been applied to her.

‘How dare she speak to me in that style!’ said Jenny, pacing up and down. ‘How dare she vent her insolence on me! What does *she* know? And *he*—the poor, cringing creature, that stood by and listened! He’s afraid of her—I am not, and never shall be!’

‘Let her take care!’ continued Jenny, speaking aloud, ‘I shan’t be attacked in that way before the house. Disgraceful! But if that man had the heart of a man, or was even like Welbore Craven, he would have sent her shrinking to her room with a look.’

Jenny was really in a little fury. Presently, however, came a gentler tone. She thought of that musical peal, Queen of Grey Forest. That Queen of Grey Forest kept chiming in her ear like the village bells of the place. Queen of Grey Forest—Lady Bountiful—possibly Lady Maxwell—for Jenny Bell. She began to walk with pride—seat in the church—carriage—companionship with the highest—for Jenny knew what she could do in that direction;—and sweeter than all, to reign where her enemy, Charlotte, had reigned—the evicted pauper, who had once evicted her! Was this not a strange retribution?

But something stood between her and that vision, more tremendous miles than lay between London and Grey Forest itself.

Charlotte, the calm but resolute, she had a

certain instinct, was busy ; and that woman, who had slandered her so vilely, might live for years to come. Jenny's lips curled acidly, and, as usual, she stamped her foot.

She read no French novel that night, but went to bed, and lay awake in a flutter—a thing that had not occurred for years to her.

But next morning Jenny was the same again, and to her was restored her old sweetness. Not so with the barrister.

He came in with a conscious, shrinking look, as though he was ashamed to face his children seated round. His eyes dropped guiltily, as they fell on Jenny opposite. But her calm presence of mind survived all his awkwardness very handsomely. She was kind, gentle, and affable to her pupils. She just stole a look at the servant, whom, she fancied, bore a knowing air, as though he were behind the scenes. Sir Frederick hurried away down to his business.

Jenny was left to her duties. As she was going upstairs, she heard him call her to his study.

‘You don’t, of course,’ he said, awkwardly,

‘feel anything about that—that unpleasant scene of last night. You are too sensible; and she, poor woman, did not know what she was saying.’

‘Oh! no, sir—dear, no,’ said Jenny, sadly; ‘but it is very distressing—most painful for me. I think—I *think* it must end—I cannot endure it.’

‘So it shall,’ said he, hurriedly, ‘so it shall. Only have patience—we are all more or less tried in this life. But if you have thought over,’ he added, meaningly, ‘what I said last night with favour, *I* can wait, and cheerfully *too*.’

He passed out, and left Jenny reflecting.

Two days after, the solicitor of Sir Frederick Maxwell, Bart., Q.C., had entered into the preliminaries for the purchase of Grey Forest. There were the usual *pourparlers*, but it was understood that the Baronet would not drive a very hard bargain. At the same time, a communication was made privately to the solicitor who had sent the deeds, that there was something a little suspicious about these documents.

As Jenny passed through the hall one morn-

ing, she glanced, as she always did, at the letter-box, and saw, sleeping within the bars of its cage, an imprisoned billet. It was always a pleasant amusement for her, this rifling of the letter-box, and she found entertainment in turning over and searching the physiognomies of all the despatches which arrived for the barrister. She swooped, as it were, on the new prize, and plundered the cage.

It was for her—a square, official-looking, rather club-looking envelope ; and when Jenny came to study the seal, she read ‘United Conservative Club’ upon it. Besides, there were two initials entangled together in the corner, like a pair of wrestlers, and these were ‘C. C.’

Jenny took it up to her room, with a fluttering heart. Here was something like progress ; here, too, which was better still, was homage to those little powers of attraction which she possessed, and which she was humbly thankful that she possessed. Besides—shall it be confessed?—our Jenny began to look upon this youth with a sort of interest. She was a woman ; and he began to strike her as bold

and a little handsome, and she was pleased that he admired her—*her*—the lowly Jenny. He was of good rank, and as school life and law was monotonous, it filled in the hours agreeably. Yes, Jenny began to dwell upon the image of young Craven with something like pleasure. This was the letter:—

‘DEAR MISS BELL,—I have not seen you for a long time now. What are you doing? Where have you been? I wish to see you very much, not to tell you anything unpleasant, but to have a talk, one of our *old* talks. Do you recollect “the smoking-room?” The park is now my smoking-room, where I take my morning “weed,” between ten and eleven. You may be shopping, or visiting, or anything, and I hope will have to cross it about the same time. Don’t, of course, let me interfere with that ancient Sir Frederick Buzzard, who, if he requires your attendance, must have it.

‘Yours,
‘W. C.’

Jenny read this document several times, and admired it much. She grew a little excited. 'Ah! Miss Charlotte!' she said, and smiled. Jenny's future path did, indeed, seem smiling enough. Here were two matrimonial alleys leading—both dimly—to baronetcies. Who could tell?

Sir Frederick Maxwell was gone to his court, and Jenny went to the study, sat herself down in his chair, drew it in, got out his pens, his ink, and paper—all which articles were on a scale of abundance and luxury, each the best of its kind, and over a soft handsome bed of red blotting paper, began to write.

Jealous, too, she thought, with a smile, as her eye fell on the allusion to 'that ancient Sir Frederick Buzzard.' She was in merry mood, things were going so smoothly, and wrote merrily.

'DEAR MR. CRAVEN,—You have not seen me because I have been *very* busy, as indeed I *always* am. You know in what a genteel sort of slavery I live, though my master, "that

ancient Sir F. Buzzard," as you call him so funnily, is not a tyrant. Can I understand you about the park and my walks? How did you find out that I would have to go to the Rev. Mr. Pole's female class at that hour? I am afraid you are very sly and too wise, or is it a sort of instinct? *Do* I recollect the smoking-room? Do I forget how *your* skill and calm sagacity *saved us* at a moment when *my* firmness, I confess, deserted me? Do we ever forget, dear Mr. Craven, the happiest days of our lives? No, as a certain poet remarked in a charming little poem—To Miriam, was it not?—

"The brighter charms that bind us,
We never leave behind us."

Those lines cling to my memory. Yes; if I can escape my gaoler's vigilance, I suppose I must be in the new smoking-room to-morrow.

'Ever yours,
'JENNY.'

Jenny left a blank where the two lines occurred, and when she got upstairs, after some

half an hour's rummaging among her little effects, she stumbled on the old newspaper cutting from the *Dorkingshire Conservative*; and then, selecting two that seemed to suit the situation, copied them in accurately.

When she rose from the desk, and went to the door for this office, which she did a little suddenly, she heard a sound in the hall, and saw Master Jack skulking up the stairs. Of late a suspicion had once or twice flashed across Jenny that this odious urchin might be watching her—employed, perhaps, so to do. She called to him sharply.

‘Come here, sir.’

He answered, doggedly, ‘Mamma wants me.’

‘I don’t care,’ said Jenny, her colour mounting. ‘I don’t care who wants you. Come down here.’

He did so, slowly. And Jenny caught him by the ear—her favourite spot.

‘Come in here, sir,’ said Jenny, leading him by that delicate organ, and shutting the door.

‘Now,’ she said, ‘have you learnt the six pages of grammar you got yesterday?’

‘No.’

‘No! and why didn’t you—eh?’ said Jenny, sweetly.

‘Mamma wanted me to stay with her.’

‘Take that,’ said Jenny, giving him a fine full slap, that embraced the whole side of his cheek. ‘So you won’t learn your lessons, you odious, insolent, disobedient brat! You go up to your mamma now.’

He gave her a scowl, and turned hastily to go.

‘And look here,’ and Jenny’s brow assumed a menacing look, ‘I warn you not to come spying on *me*. Mind, if you are caught again, I’ll have the coachman in, to flog you while he can stand over you.’

This threat did not seem to affright him, for he was staring doggedly at the blotting-paper on Jenny’s desk.

‘Go, sir,’ said Jenny, giving him a push in the direction of the door. He disappeared, but slowly, and taking his own time.

Jenny was pleased with this encounter, and went back to her writing. She did not like the

first draft—she thought it scarcely arch or *piquant* enough ; so, she tore it across, and again across, and flung it into the basket under the table—the Barrister's dust pit. She wrote another, much more to her mind, got her bonnet, and took it herself to the penny post, just a street away.

As soon as the door was heard to slam, the urchin, Jack, his cheek still smarting, stole down to the study, and began to pry and poke about as secretly as a mischievously inclined cub would do. He turned the blotting-book inside out—looked under the desk, and even into the waste-paper basket. He was heard not long after asking the housekeeper had she any gum ? He got the gum, and he went upstairs to his mamma's room.

CHAPTER IX.

‘THE SMOKING-ROOM.’

THE next day when the Barrister had gone down to court in his cab, Jenny tripped upstairs to her room, and descended shortly in her brightest and most brilliant walking dress. She had taste, had Jenny ; and on this occasion she fringed her round, radiant face in a delicate horse-shoe bonnet, with deep crimson ribbons, which set her off prodigiously, and which was kept for special festivals. She also indulged herself in a pair of pale French gloves, and though her size was a little large for a lady’s—a large ‘seven’—they fitted her exquisitely.

But as she was going down the steps, a cab drove up, and the face of Sir Frederick appeared at the window. He had forgotten a paper, or some notes, and had driven back



post. He jumped out hastily. He was struck by Jenny’s magnificence.

‘Where are you going?’ he said. ‘I can set you down anywhere.’

‘Oh, no,’ said Jenny, hastily. ‘I am going *that way*’ (pointing indistinctly in a direction that took in many quarters of the compass). ‘Thank you a *thousand* times. Dinner at half-past six to-day.’ And she was moving away.

‘Oh, I see,’ he said. ‘The Reverend Mr. Pole. That is so. Come, tell me, am I right?’

Jenny moved her head sweetly, with a motion that partook both of assent and negation, and again moved to go.

‘But how far is Mr. Pole’s? I can leave you there,’ he said.

‘Oh, no,’ said Jenny, ‘I can walk.’

‘And how long will you stay?’ said he.

‘Oh, not long,’ said Jenny, with a gentle and resigned smile, as though Mr. Pole and his ladies were one of her trials; and then at last she got away.

She took a little detour and came into the park from the *other* side, and there upon a

bench, under a tree, she saw young Craven, enjoying his new smoking-room—that is, she did not see him for a long time, but wandered about distractedly and helpless, until he—who had seen *her* long before—came good-naturedly to her aid.

‘This is very kind of you—most kind,’ he said. ‘How shall I thank you?’

Jenny, who all through the interview maintained a frightened and suspicious manner, looking round, as though police might be seen on the horizon at any moment, answered him hurriedly.

‘Not at all—not at all, Mr. Craven; but I dare not stay long.’

‘To be sure, to be sure,’ he answered. ‘And now, how have you been?—tell me all about yourself.’

‘Oh,’ said Jenny, sadly, ‘that would be a dull subject. The same monotonous round every day! What is to vary the course of *my* working life—unless, indeed——’ And she lifted her eyes, with a sidelong glance at her companion, dropped them again, and coloured.

Our Jenny, it will be seen, was latterly getting bolder in her play, and risking more at each move.

But he passed by this charming opening, like a stupid country fellow, as he was.

I wonder did the word 'bête,' and the image it represents, rise in Jenny's brain. Nay, he seemed to be eager not to take it, for he went on with haste.

'Well,' he said, 'and what are you doing? —I mean your friend, the new Baronet—old Sir Frederick Buzzard, ha! ha!'

The painful struggle on Jenny's lips, between respect for her employer, and the rich sense of the ludicrous engendered by this happy conceit, was really amusing. But she gave way at last to uncontrollable laughter.

'Old Buzzard,' said he, relishing his own wit. 'And what is *he* doing? What will he *do* with his money? I hope he will leave you a handsome legacy, Miss Bell. But somebody told me he was buying an estate.'

This was meant to be brought in with an easy *déagé* air, as a mere careless observation.

It was clumsily done; but Jenny's mind was sailing away on another point. Though he laughed at 'old Buzzard,' you see, this was all a little secret jealousy.

'Yes,' said Jenny, smiling, and busy with her glove, 'he is talking of it. Indeed, he was good enough to consult me on the subject. And I suppose you have heard,' said Jenny, 'the poor Franklyns' dear, darling Grey Forest is to be sold. They won't have an acre left—poor, poor children!'

'Yes,' said he, 'I knew that. And do you mean to say that *he* is talking of buying it?'

'He says so,' said Jenny, looking down, and still on the jealousy point. 'Someway, he has taken a fancy to it; having, I believe, some ridiculous, foolish idea, that I, being a friend of—the family—would—would like it.'

Jenny brought this out with great hesitation, and meant it for a skilful move.

But he took his less hastily. 'Exactly,' said he, eagerly. 'And you put him off it? Of course you did. Quite properly. No; it

wouldn't do. You thought of your old friends, and dissuaded him.'

'I?' said Jenny, looking at him with natural wonder.

'I tell you what,' said he, 'it must not be. The truth is, we don't want it to be sold. I knew it. I said you would help us. If we could only just stave it off for a month or two.'

'We?' said Jenny, looking at him with a slight tinge of distrust.

'Yes,' said he, going on. 'I don't mind letting you into our little secrets, though they *said* I wasn't. The truth is, we expect that old Cousin Hall will do something—matters are in train, you see. But all we want is a little delay—not to be pressed, you see—and then everything will come straight.'

Jenny's lip was curling. The little furnaces in her eyes were being kindled.

'I do see,' she said. 'And I suppose it was for this you wished to see me to-day?'

'Well,' said he, awkwardly, 'partly. Nothing like candour, Miss Bell. I thought that

if we could get your attractive influences on our side, everything would go well.'

He bowed, to emphasize this clumsy compliment.

'Of course!' said Jenny, coldly—'of course! But why should you come to me? Why should I interfere? I think you know that the Franklyns have not treated me very well. Would it not be a little too generous?'

'Ah, but you *are* so generous—so high-minded—I *know* you would recollect nothing So, indeed, I said to them; but she ——'

He stopped.

'Go on!' said Jenny, with a scoff; 'let us hear it all. What did *she* say? Then, I presume, the old attachment goes on? Ah, Mr. Craven, Mr. Craven,' added she, suddenly assuming her old manner, 'how sly—how dreadfully sly of you; and not to tell me, your old friend, poor little Jenny.'

She had twanged the string of his self-sufficiency, and he smiled. 'Why,' said he, 'you are wonderful at guessing. Poor Charlotte, she has made a noble, valiant battle of

it. I never saw such a girl. She has fought through it all—alone.’

‘Indeed,’ said Jenny, with great interest; ‘and I suppose Sir Welbore, like a true, honourable man, will not stand in the way.’

‘Why, you see,’ said he, with importance, ‘there is a little mystery here. There are mysteries on all sides of us.’

‘So it appears,’ said Jenny. ‘And I suppose this has been going on all the while—privately?’

‘Well,’ said he, with great complacency, ‘I may say, it has. To see a brave, noble girl, to whom I had plighted my troth’—he gave out these words with great satisfaction—‘to whom I was bound by all the laws of honour and morality—to see her struggling on nobly, without a sigh or a complaint, and cheerfully resigning——’

‘The brilliant prospect that was before her! Of course, I understand,’ said Jenny.

He did not perceive the manner in which this was said.

‘But I don’t mind saying to you that obsta-

cles are passing away. In a short time—a very short time—we expect my father will come round—in fact, *is* coming round. But, mum, you understand?’

‘Perfectly!’ said Jenny.

‘Everything will go smooth,’ he said, warming. ‘And I may say I have had a good share in it. I know a thing or two.’

Jenny laughed a little harshly. ‘You are very wise, Mr. Craven; I always said so. But, in a serious step of this sort, one should look carefully on all sides. Even the wisest of men, like *young* Mr. Craven, may not see something.’

He did not like the tone of Jenny’s voice.

‘Oh! I have provided for everything, Miss Bell.’

‘Of course anything *I* may say will be regarded with a natural suspicion—from the peculiar relation. I make no secret of it—I have no strong affection for Miss Franklyn, nor she for me; but, as a sort of friend I tell you, I think you should look well into the matter before taking any serious step.’

There was such an unconcealed sneer in Jenny's voice, that he was nettled, and answered with an attempt at a sneer also.

'This seems a little wicked, Miss Bell,' he said, in a wounded tone. 'I am afraid I can guess the motives that are at work.'

Jenny laughed again.

'Accept my congratulation,' she said; 'you are making a *brilliant* match, in every light you can look at it.'

He coloured. 'These little remarks have no effect on me.'

'Of course not. You have the satisfaction of doing what is right. Yet,' said Jenny, suddenly changing her voice into a key of great tenderness, 'we were once great friends. You used to advise me to let me consult you in my little difficulties. Our acquaintance has furnished me with some delightful memories, which in my lonely hours;—but no matter. I must speak—it is only fair to warn you, Sir Frederick Maxwell has heard strange rumours about your friends—something about deeds of trust have turned up, and which are suspected

not to be all right. I can say no more. Good-bye.'

He was confounded.

'Stay—stay,' said he, 'tell me more. I want to know——'

'I dare not,' said Jenny, sweetly. 'I cannot—I am bound up. Good-bye. There may be nothing in the rumour. But still it is right you should know it. Curious, they should not have told you!'

She left him looking after her and wondering—speculating, in his mind, what she could have alluded to. He then went his way slowly.

Jenny went home in a curious frame of mind. Latterly things were going not quite so smoothly as she was accustomed to make them go; and she even felt a presentiment that they might be worse yet. She seemed to be losing the spring and spirit of victory which had been carrying her forward. 'She is plotting,' said Jenny, to herself, walking very fast. 'I am *sure* she is plotting in secret against me. The smooth, cunning piece of virtue!' said

she, with disgust, 'with her quiet air of suffering. And that—*fool*, to be caught by her!' Jenny was posting along at a fierce rate. 'But I shall beat her yet. She shall be no match for me. She shall *never* get back to Grey Forest, if I die for it.'

The mention of that sweet name had a soothing effect on Jenny. 'Queen of Grey Forest,' and 'Lady Maxwell,' again began to chime in her ears. Never were there such musical bells. Still she had the sense of a presentiment hanging over her; and compressing her lip, she entered the house, determined not to be too leisurely, and to hurry on matters.

CHAPTER X.

JENNY WORKS.

BUT, alas for our Jenny! that fatal assignation in the Park was destined to accumulate very many heavy stumbling-blocks in her road, more than her poor weak shoulders could get out of the way. The Barrister, when Jenny was gone about two minutes, recollected something he wished to ask her, and seizing his hat, ran out after her. He followed down to Piccadilly, and saw her crossing to the Park. This was not the road to Mr. Pole's chapel. So he stopped suddenly, and an idea occurring to him, followed slowly, and at a distance. He was a lawyer; and what to other men was an inequality in the sand, was to him a footprint.

He saw it all—nay, heard some of it; saw

Jenny return ;—saw the whole, with the anger of a vain, weak man, discovering that he has been duped. Poor Jenny ! It is to be feared that half-hour's work has placed the charming castle of Grey Forest upon a magic carpet, and transported it through the air into another quarter of the globe. She does not know it or suspect it.

She will have hard labour to set things straight, for he was an odd man ; and once touched in his vanity, never forgave or forgot.

Scarcely in the best of humours, Jenny went to her room, and cast aside her decorations. She sat by her fire, and cast up her accounts—her moral accounts. In ten minutes she had mapped out a scheme. She must strive and act speedily and with decision.

She was thinking of her friend, Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet ; and how jealous and strict he was about family honour. She was thinking a little pettishly of the perverse turn things seemed to be taking latterly. However, as she before thought, precious time was being frittered away. She dawdled rather too much. If



she but had an Archimedean spot to stand on—a secure vantage-ground of fixed station and commanding elevation—not the slippery footing of a mere governess, she would move the earth.

At dinner, strange to say, the Barrister was moody and out of humour. He scarcely spoke to Jenny—a thing she had never known before; and Jenny detected his eyes roaming to her secretly, with a glowering, moody expression. At times he would by an effort shake this off, and put a sort of constraint upon himself, making an effort at being good-humoured; but presently the original moodiness returned.

‘Some of these Court creatures,’ thought Jenny, ‘had treated him roughly. He had broken down in a case. But why should he vent it on me?’ thought Jenny. Why, indeed? Why vent it on that gentle imploring face, who now so piteously deprecated his wrath? She did all she could; but he was an odd man, and had odd ways.

That evening, as Jenny was thinking of going down to the study as usual, she..

heard a step on the stairs, and looking over the bannister cautiously, saw young Jack descending very softly. This was an offence against school-room laws; but Jenny wondered what he was going down with such secrecy for; and then she heard him tap at the study door, and go in. It was altogether a proceeding of complete indifference, yet she did not like it. This wretched cub she detested. He stayed there a full quarter of an hour. Jenny would have given a good deal to have been invisibly present; or, indeed, to have been merely separated by the ordinary partition of door or wall. In default of better modes of hearing, such would have been welcome; but it was dangerous and impracticable.

Fully a quarter of an hour was the cub closeted with his father.

Jenny then thought she heard a noise, and began to move upstairs again. But at the sick woman's door a wan face was peering out, and part of a long, shrunk figure. To Jacky it said, 'Come here; tell me what he said.'

Jenny had begun to look on this woman as her enemy. She felt within her a curious dislike, which was strengthening every day. Some way she had a notion that this weak dying woman was dangerous, more or less dangerous. Jenny did not care to conceal herself, but boldly confronted her.

‘Oh! it is you,’ said the withered lips. Jenny thought how like a ghastly hag or witch her figure looked. ‘Oh! *Miss Bell*, I am very well, you see!’

‘I am glad to hear it, madam,’ said Jenny, looking at her, coldly, and conveying how repulsive was the figure she saw.

‘No, you are not,’ said the other, quickly; ‘no, you are not. Don’t give yourself the trouble of telling what is not true to me. But I am *very* well—I am getting better every day. The doctors say so. Now!’

‘I don’t want to dispute with you,’ said Jenny, in the same hard tone. ‘I have no object in setting you right.’

‘Haven’t you!’ said the other, as usual getting excited. ‘No, of course not. No,

you haven't. You feel quite secure, no doubt! Ah! but take care, my fine lady! You don't know everything—you don't know all that may be going on, wise as you be. Ah! there's my Jacky coming. Come in, come in, Jacky, and tell mamma all about it. You and I, Jacky dear, weak as we are, will be a match for her yet.'

The cub gave Jenny a look of defiance, thinking, no doubt, of the slaps on his cheek, and the door shut them in.

Jenny trembled with rage and fury, to be bearded by these two miserable creatures, whom she despised.

Worse than all, she feared they might indeed be plotting to bring ruin on such an innocent head as hers. Such creatures often had a secret strength. She trembled. But she did not fear them. But towards the miserable lady, who could be so insolent to her, she felt a feeling of something like hate, that intensified every moment.

She went down hurriedly to the study. The Barrister looked at her steadily as she

entered, then cast down his eyes upon his books a moment, then spoke to her with all the old cheerfulness. The clouds had passed away. He was himself again. What tricks does imagination play us, thought Jenny, wisely. She had conjured up a whole nightmare of plots and conjurations.

Never was she so winning—so gentle—so seductive! It would have been hard for mortal to resist her. She was soft and engaging—melancholy and pensive, and somehow conveyed, by mysterious process, that this tone of mind was associated with a deep, passionate, but, alas! unrequited attachment. She was only a poor governess; the green places of life were not for her. So she must only suffer in silence, and without complaint, though her heart might break.

The Baronet listened, and in his own way tried some comfort—still scarcely received it with the raptures that might reasonably have been expected from one of his weak character. But he was an odd man—a very odd man;—a vain man, too.

Jenny found a letter in the letter-box that night. It was from the Rev. Mr. Wells, whom she had quite forgotten. It was in a wounded, broken tone. He must leave, he said, to-morrow. His rector was deeply offended, and he must hurry back. He had waited from day to day, in the hope of hearing from her. He had thought he was an old friend—one of the few that she honoured with some little degree of liking. But no matter now! He was going away. Perhaps it had been better if he had never come. But no matter now. He had called repeatedly, but could never get in. The unhappy Curate had indeed called many times. The fact was, Jenny was getting sadly bored with his obscure hints of a deep passion, and his more open rhapsodies. She had, in truth, a supreme contempt for him and his nature. She never liked these whining men, as she called them.

She went on with his letter. He had made it his business, he said, to inquire after their common friends, in whom he heard she was so interested. He had met Mr. Craven that

evening, who had told him there was good news for the Franklyns—some very good news—something, as he (the Curate) gathered it, about money. But young Craven would not say anything more explicit. ‘Perhaps,’ added the Curate, ‘our dear children may be back in old Grey Forest again, and we may all meet there, as of old. I am very wretched and low spirited. May I call to-morrow, to bid you good-bye?’

Back in Grey Forest, thought Jenny. Never. And she turned hastily round, and entered the study again, where was Sir Frederick, still with his briefs.

She came back to look for something. She could not find it. The Barrister watched her movements. Then she asked him carelessly when dear, dear Grey Forest was to be bought—‘by the way,’ she introduced it.

He said he could not tell. There were difficulties. ‘I am not so enthusiastic about that purchase as I was,’ he added.

‘What! give it up,’ said Jenny, clasping her hands. ‘Oh! sir, if you were to know

how I have been feasting on the idea. Only the other night I had such a sweet, delicious dream. I thought I was wandering in its gardens.'

'I am sorry,' said he, gravely—'very sorry. But, however, it is not given up as yet.'

'But, I thought,' said Jenny, with a deep sigh—'I thought it was something like a promise. I thought you had so kindly intended——But no matter; I am used,' she added, with a gentle smile, 'to these little disappointments. It will be all the same in a hundred, perhaps in a dozen years.'

She said this in so plaintive and touching a manner—in a tone so exquisitely mournful, that the Barrister raised his head, and said softly—

'Oh, Jenny! I don't know what to think. If I only knew—if I could trust you—anybody;—but no matter. We will see about it. There. Good-night.'

Jenny tripped away with a light step. 'It is done!' she said, exulting. But no time was to be lost. Her confidence in her own powers

was restored. 'After all,' she said, smiling, 'who can help Jenny like Jenny? All their castles would soon be tumbling about their ears.'

At once she sat down and wrote a note to the Curate—a gentle, tender note. Could he put off his sad journey for one day? She wished to see him—to consult him,—to have *his* advice. Don't let her, however, interfere with his plans—no, not for the world. Even he, she was grieved to see, did not understand her. No one, indeed, *properly* understood her; but she had thought that *he*, from their old friendship;—it was not much matter. There were many things one was obliged to do, which, if the true secret were known;—but no matter about that, too. Action, action, thought Jenny, as she lay down to rest.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EMBASSY.

HE came the next day. He, too, strange to say, was moody and injured. He was very sorry—he must go; delighted to help her any way, but could not stay longer.

Jenny heard him calmly. She had no notion of having to take trouble with so contemptible an instrument as this, and her first impulse was to dismiss him at once; but she wanted him.

‘Go, then,’ she said, with her old, sad manner. ‘Of course, you must go. Your interests, indeed, I should be sorry to stand in the way of. Some one else will help me. Thank you a thousand times for *all* your

goodness. Good-bye, dear Mr. Wells; think of me sometimes.'

He was taken back by this ready acceptance of his declaration. He coloured, he stammered.

'Could I do nothing for you, dear Miss Bell?' he said, hesitatingly.

'Nothing,' said Jenny, with a smile—'nothing that I would ask you to do. I shall find some one to help me; in fact, I *have* found.'

He grew disquieted.

'I am sure,' he said, 'if I thought—that is—'

'Do you think,' said Jenny, earnestly, 'I would put a kind friend's sympathy to such a test? Never! Good-bye, dearest Mr. Wells.'

He was very much troubled.

'What *can* I do?' he said, distractedly. 'I would give anything—I would give the world to show what I feel. Tell me what you——'

'No!' said Jenny, firmly; 'I have considered. Perhaps you have been too kind to me to let you run any risk for me. Perhaps—but no matter. We will think of it no more.'

'This is cruel—this is unkind,' he said, bitterly; 'you won't trust me, I see. There is some one else. I knew it. The old story.'

'Ah,' said she, 'if you only *did* know.'

'I will stay,' he said, desperately. 'I will write to him to-night. He 'could not grudge me a few days. No, he is not such a tyrant!' he added, excitedly.

'Impossible,' said Jenny; 'it is too painful a duty—more fitted for *his* hands.'

'Whose hands?' said the other, quickly.

'Ah!' said Jenny, '*you* would never go to Sir Welbore Craven. He will be in town to-morrow. See him at his club; speak with him—tell him—'

'Is that all?' said the Curate. 'I know him very well. To be sure——'

'It is a dreadful duty, but *must* be done. How shall I speak it? You will prejudge me, of course. You must warn him against this marriage. Ah, pity me, pity me, dear Mr. Wells!' she added, sinking into a chair.

'Against Charlotte's marriage! Good

gracious! Why? wherefore?' he said, bewildered.

'Pity me! pity me!' continued Jenny, rocking herself. 'My friend, my childhood's friend! But,' she said, starting up, 'I *dare* not let it pass. It would haunt me to my grave. *Forgery!* A good man to have his house dishonoured! No, no!'

'Forgery! dishonoured!' he repeated, mechanically.

'We have the papers in the house, sent to Sir Frederick. There could be no concealment,' said she, speaking in a very hurried manner. 'Conscience! conscience! Mr. Wells. And that it should have come upon *me*—their childhood's friend! Is it not a terrible trial?'

'Oh, oh, Miss Bell!' he said, reproachfully, 'from you—*her* friend. You must get some one else. I cannot, indeed.'

'So I said,' said Jenny, scornfully; 'and so I told you. It is to be done, nevertheless. We have consciences—some of us, at least. *You* don't understand me, Mr. Wells; I did not

expect you would, and there are few who do. You jump at the harshest construction. Naturally. No matter, I must write now. I have many letters to get through.'

'And you want me to betray, to denounce my old friends—my kind good friends? Why, I heard Sir Welbore was relenting. Ah, don't, don't!' he added, piteously—'don't make me do this, please don't.'

'*Make* you do it,' said Jenny, with flashing eye. 'Who talks of making you? You are incurable, I see. Take your own view of this, and leave me, sir, I beg.'

'Oh, Miss Bell!' said he, with a groan.

'Do you suppose it is a pleasant task for *me*?' said she, turning sharply on him. 'Of course *I* feel nothing!'

But he shook his head sadly, and took up his hat in silence. Jenny watched him anxiously.

'You are right,' she said, at last. 'Go down to your parish again. Self is the first instinct. Do not forget, however,' she said, 'that it was *you* who betrayed me into this confidence. I

confess I thought—but no matter. Good-bye.'

There was a strange expression of anguish in his face. 'I dare not,' he said. 'Those poor orphans—I could not bring myself to it.' And then, opening the door slowly, he stood looking back wistfully. Jenny never looked at him. Finally he passed out.

Jenny stamped her foot impatiently, and let her hand and arm fall upon the table.

'Fool!' she said; 'weak, empty fool! How could I have wasted time on such a creature! Ah, this is the way they all fail me! The trouble I have had with this crawling Curate! But no matter. I shall find better instruments.'

The door was opened softly, and he appeared again, laid down his hat, and said, mournfully, 'I will do *whatever* you want.'

'Ha,' thought Jenny, 'every obstacle gives way—queen of Grey Forest before a month.'

The miserable Curate slunk about the approaches to Sir Welbore's club the whole of

the next day, but could not see him. Two days after he did meet him, and in a guilty way imparted to him what he had heard, first binding him to solemn secrecy as to the channel through which it reached him.

The Baronet went nigh to fainting in the street. It was as though some one said, 'The person you have been sitting next in the railway first class carriage for the last six hours is just out of a plague hospital.' He shrunk away, and had to get wine at his club.

There was a frightful scene at his home that evening. The Baronet, Sir Welbore, had indeed showed signs of yielding. A stout, tall, hale elderly gentleman, who had lived at Dieppe, had waited on him, and made some offers that really made him gasp. The words that fell from the tall, hale, elderly gentleman seemed like a stream of gold pieces falling down and clinking on each other. The Baronet told the gentleman he did him a great deal of—er—honour, and he should be glad—er—to hear again—er—from him.

These melodious offers quite drowned the

unpleasant sound of the word 'suicide,' but it could not drown the louder and uglier cry of FORGERY. Jenny's fate was dancing up and down in the scales.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EMISSARY AND HIS MISSION.

THAT evening came the Curate to wait on his mistress, to recount his mission. Jenny met him eagerly on the stairs, and found him very downcast. ‘Well,’ she said, impatiently; ‘oh come in here,’ and she brought him into the study.

He told his story in an excited sort of way. He had met young Craven not long after, and tried to avoid him. But he then caught hold of him.

“‘They have told my father,’” he said. “‘I know whence that move came.’” And then, said the Curate, ‘he became outrageously insolent in his language about—about—’

‘About poor me,’ said Jenny. ‘Of course,

I expect it. Ever since I was a child it has been the same,' added she, mournfully. 'Nothing but harsh cruel words from all sides. Even my friends—friends whom I love—even they,' said Jenny, looking musingly at Mr. Wells, 'fall naturally into the same strain.'

Much excited, the Curate made a motion to catch her hand, and protested earnestly that she did him wrong—that he would fly to the ends of the earth to help her. 'Why,' he added, ruefully, 'am I here? Am I not running a dreadful risk by staying? As it is, I have nearly undone myself; but——'

'And what did he say,' said Jenny, coming back to business, 'this kind friend?'

'He talked of a plot,' answered the Curate, 'and a conspiracy; said he would baffle it; and then he *dared* to speak about some one being vindictive, malicious, and——'

'Go on,' said Jenny, smiling; 'I can bear it all.'

'But I stopped him quickly,' added the other, with fresh excitement. 'I told him

I would not listen to him ; that it was cowardly—mean—to speak so of an unprotected girl.’

‘Unprotected,’ said Jenny, holding out her hand with enthusiasm. ‘No, no! not while I have such hearts that can love me as I *know* I have.’

‘So I told him,’ said the Curate ; ‘and that you, and that I, and every one, scorned his vile slanders.’

‘Noble, brave, generous!’ murmured she.

‘I could have struck him,’ said the excited Curate, now hurrying on in a torrent of words. ‘I could have——’

‘No, no, no,’ said Jenny. ‘It were best to bear these things in charity. And what did he tell you about the Franklyns?’

‘Yes,’ said the other. ‘They are doing well, he said. Oh, I recollect—Grey Forest is not to be sold. It is finally settled.’

‘Not to be sold?’ said Jenny, hastily.

‘No; it has been saved. A friend or relative has come forward—a cousin living in France. All the incumbrances are to be paid

off; and as soon as Charlotte is well, they are all to go back.'

Jenny's eyes lighted up with rage. Here was her kingdom of Grey Forest—the Spanish Castle—all destroyed in a second.

'She is ill, is she?' said Jenny. 'I didn't know *that*. So they go back to Grey Forest, do they? Perhaps you have more good news still,' added Jenny, sarcastically.

'Yes, I think he said something else,' said he, dreamily; 'something about these deeds—these so-called forgeries!'

'So-called,' said Jenny, with a sneer.

'That was his expression,' said the Curate. 'He asked where they were. He said they must get them up. I told him Sir Frederick had them.'

'What made you do that?' said Jenny, with sudden fierceness. 'It was a pity—I mean,' she added, changing her tone, 'a misfortune.'

In short, he left Jenny with this good news in a sadly disturbed state of mind. He went away himself in a stranger state of distraction. He thought he had never seen Jenny looking

so dazzling. But he felt he ought to leave this fatal London in the morning, and he half determined on a desperate extrication—to fling himself suddenly into the train, and be borne away from this seductive Circe.

Jenny, however, actually lay awake for a couple of hours. She was really disturbed. Her cruel enemy was gradually drawing to the front. But before she dropped off to sleep something occurred to her. ‘Ah,’ said she, raising herself on the pillow, ‘*that* will do it.’

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‘Then,’ said Jenny, with a noble and heroic burst; ‘there, now, you belong to your friends. *They* must watch over you. Those who have long loved you—secretly, but long—it will be their duty to comfort, to console, to watch over. Yes, dearest Mr. Wells, away with all delicacy—we can speak out now.’

The Curate sprang to his feet with rapture.

‘Are you serious?’ he said. ‘No, no, you are deceiving me. It is too blessed news to be true.’

‘Can you not have guessed?’ said Jenny, with a smile. ‘Oh, dull, incredulous men! You make us poor women, with blushing and confusion, tell out our most darling secrets.’

‘Divine girl!’ murmured the Curate, looking at her in rapture. ‘What are their wretched offices after this! I despise them! Oh, Jenny, Jenny, you have changed despair into joy! But tell me—you *must* tell me——’

‘Hush, hush,’ said Jenny, looking round, and speaking very fast. ‘We will talk of this again in a few days. But now I am going to put your devotion to the test—to such a test!’

'Name it!—anything! Say, you wish me to sail for China—America—anywhere!'

'No, not so far as China; but a long way.'

'Ah, Jenny,' said he, 'I am so glad—I would travel whole continents for you.'

Jenny gave him her hand—that round, plump, little hand—perhaps as a stimulant or cordial. He took it, exactly as a thirsty man would a stimulant or cordial.

'Strange things have taken place,' said Jenny, still speaking very fast. 'Strange, mysterious complications have come about. There is danger menacing me. I have secret enemies!' said Jenny, excitedly.

'Secret enemies,' said he. 'No—such goodness, such sweetness—impossible.'

'It is so,' said Jenny, sadly. 'They are plotting all about me to ruin me. I have no one to aid me—no one to look to, except——'

She gave him a look of angelic sweetness. Again he seized her hand.

'But if they plot, we *must* counterplot. We must scheme in self-defence. She I have discovered—Charlotte—would destroy me!'

He was amazed.

‘Oh, no,’ he said, doubtfully—‘impossible. She seemed so good, so amiable.’

‘Ah! she always pleased you. But *I* know. *Recollect, she once ruined me, and she will do so again, if she can!*’

This seemed to make an impression on the Curate. There was a long pause.

‘Where do you wish me to go for you?’ he asked.

‘A long journey,’ said Jenny, sadly. ‘Across to France, then down all France, to Avignon.’

‘Is that all?’ he said. ‘Why, I could be there to-morrow night. What am I to do? When am I to go?’

‘There is a small packet—very precious, and of the greatest importance—which we are going to intrust to you. There is a family called Hall, living there. You must find them out, give them the packet, and open it before them. I shall give you a letter, which you shall open when you get to Avignon; and you will promise me to carry out all the instructions contained in it.’

‘But——’ said the Curate, hesitatingly.

‘When you return,’ said Jenny, with a bright, beaming face, ‘*then* we shall talk of what is near to both our hearts. After toil, pleasure. You shall tell me your story, and, perhaps—I shall tell you mine.’

‘Angel!’ murmured the Curate, and finally, for the last time, kissed her hand.

Jenny returned triumphant for the moment, yet presently began to despond. It had been a terrible blow. The crown of Grey Forest was gone from her! No matter. *She* should not wear it, if the heavens and earth were to be moved. What about this Cousin Hall?

When she came in, she made breakfast. The Barrister, and his son, when the bell rang, came in from the study together. Jenny looked at them suspiciously. The cub looked at her with his usual insolence, but the clouds had passed away from the Baronet’s brow. He was himself again. Jenny raised her eyes to Heaven in unspeakable thankfulness. She laid out, how, later on, she would gently and sweetly remonstrate with, and have a formal

reconciliation, with all the flourishes and accompaniments.

But Sir Frederick told her how he was obliged to go away for a day or two, a little suddenly—a case down at Liverpool. He would be up again shortly. He said good-bye to her, warmly, and Jenny got up a little bit of mournful demeanour expressly for the occasion. He went away about twelve o'clock.

Events now began to crowd themselves. These were, perhaps, some of the most exciting days in Jenny's life.

She was fluttering about the house in a fever of agitation. His departure was the most strangely opportune thing. When his cab had driven away, she waited a quarter of an hour or so, then went down softly to the study, ran to the tin case which contained the Franklyn deeds, chose out the suspicious instrument, and saw that there could be no mistake; then began to pack it up carefully.

She sealed it, and tied it round with cord; then wrote a letter on Sir Frederick's sta-

tionery, and sealed that. Then she went to her room.

It was, indeed, an exciting day for her, and her cheek glowed.

Then, about four o'clock, she got her bonnet and went down stairs to go out. Out of the study came the cub, Jack, and met her.

He put a pencilled note into her hand.

'Papa wrote this at the railway,' he said, 'and said particularly, you were to give what he mentions there to me.'

There was a dogged look about the boy which Jenny did not like, and she thought of taking her accustomed enjoyment on his cheek, but her mind was too full of more important things. The pencilled scrap was as follows:—

L. & N. W. Railway.

'DEAR MISS BELL,—I want the Franklyn deed I spoke to you about the other night. I stupidly forgot it, and it is of the last importance. Give it to Jack, and he will send it by next train. It is marked "A.D."'

You are the only one who knows its appearance.

‘F. M.’

The cub had such a look of insolent meaning that Jenny again thought of her favourite punishment, but she forbore.

‘I know nothing about it,’ she said. ‘How can I find deeds? I shall write to him.’

‘But you were to give it to me,’ said the boy. ‘And you do know where it is, Miss Bell. You know you were searching there just now.’

Jenny instantly grasped the packet she had tied up so carefully. The boy’s eyes were upon it.

‘It is false, you wretched little imp!’ said Jenny, in a fury. ‘And, let me tell you, if you go spying on me, I’ll——’

‘Give it to me,’ said the boy, ‘they will all know you have it; it’s a shame.’

Jenny’s palm descended fiercely. The stroke resounded loudly. Some one had been listening over the stairs, for there came a

shriek, 'Let the child alone. How dare you, woman, lay hands on my boy!' And my boy, crying, ran upstairs, threatening Jenny fiercely, and giving her at parting such a look of rage and vindictiveness.

Jenny was terribly excited. She was chafed and harassed ; but ever ready to do battle with all the world. She had a wonderful spirit, that rose in the struggle.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUDDEN PURPOSE.

AT the lodgings of the Franklyn family there was indeed a change. Hope had some way made its way in, and there were now cheerful faces to be seen. But Charlotte was still ill and depressed, and lay on a sofa in the drawing-room, doing battle with her malady, and affecting a light heart and light spirits, for the sake of those all round her.

The cousin who had lived all his life abroad, had indeed stepped on the scene like a good male fairy. Cousin Croesus he should have been called, but that he had not any of the flash and spangles which usually attend the entrance of such beings. He was a plain, hale, tall, blunt old gentleman, who seemed to be

always associated with his stick, which he leant on and brandished, and struck emphatically on the ground. This is all the outline needed for so useful, yet, as to mere detail, so unimportant a character.

The evening of the day on which we last saw Jenny, the family were together in this way. They were in a few days to leave their mean lodgings, and in a few weeks were to be down at Grey Forest, back again at the old place. Cousin John Hall had brought in *his* man of business, a skilful head and a delicate hand, who was disentangling their affairs slowly but surely. They were turning out to be not nearly in so distracted a state as was supposed; but above all, at the potent spell of some bags of gold, the twisted cords began of themselves to get free.

This evening then, at about four o'clock, came in young Craven, to ask after Charlotte. For one of his temper, he had behaved with marvellous constancy all through. To-night he entered with a troubled air. Charlotte noticed it at once.

‘You may go, dears,’ she said to her sisters ;
‘I want to speak to Mr. Craven for a moment.’

Although she had been firm in dealing with their engagement as broken off, she did not indeed order the door to be kept rigorously barred in his face, as some sterner and colder virgins might have done ; but he knew her character well, and that there was a barrier between them as impenetrable as any iron bar known. Now, however, the clouds were breaking, and there was hope.

‘You have something to tell me,’ she said.
‘More bad news ? I am always prepared.’

With much hesitation young Craven owned that it was so ; and then, with a wonderful delicacy for one of his nature, told her of the ugly story he had heard, relative to her father.

Charlotte rose up excitedly.

‘It is false !’ she said, ‘I know it is false ; some vile invention of our enemies.’

‘I don’t know,’ said he, gloomily, ‘I trust so. But, dear Charlotte, it seems a little probable, and the person that told my father——’

‘Who ? Who ?’ said Charlotte.

‘Your old friend,’ he said, ‘who could have no interest—Wells, the curate.’

‘Ah,’ said Charlotte, ‘do you not see it *now*? *Her* finger—she has been at work. I know it; that wretched man is enslaved to *her*. She has set him on this vile calumny.’

Charlotte was growing very excited. He tried to calm her. She even got up and began to walk up and down.

‘You must find him out. Help me to find him out—wring a confession out of him. He is a weak, good-natured creature, but powerless in *her* hands. Not a moment must be lost. If ever,’ she said imploringly, ‘you would wish to do me a kindness, help me now.’

Young Craven was in his element. He liked to be of importance, and rushed away. The girls, to their astonishment, found Charlotte very pale and walking about.

Young Craven hurried away. It was now past five o’clock, and he went to seek him at his lodgings. He did not find him there. He came back again later, and was told that the Rev. Mr. Wells had left town.

But Charlotte continued her nervous and excited walk up and down her room. Though she had repudiated it so scornfully to Mr. Craven, she had a terrible instinct that there was truth somewhere. That weight of anxiety that always hung over her father, seemed something more than the mere burden of pecuniary embarrassment. It always seemed like the nervous dread of coming disclosure. Indeed she knew, as well as if she had seen the fatal parchment, that something of the kind had been done. She never gave way until this moment. The old, honourable house, and her dear father's name, to be sullied by this foul charge. Everything else she had borne ; want, grief, and general misery ; but this terrible phantom of disgrace fluttering and flapping over their heads, was more than she could endure. She would give worlds to have gone forth in some direction, and have taken action in some shape ; but, unhappily, she knew no special direction in which to move. It was all a wilderness round her. But no answer came to her from young Mr. Craven. Just after six

o'clock, when the lamp was being brought in, a letter, in a strange hand, was given to Charlotte. A young boy had left it, and there was no answer. She opened it and read :—

‘ Sir Frederick Maxwell sent back to-day for one of your family deeds ; but *she* said it could not be found. She afterwards packed it in a yellow sheet of paper, and gave it to Mr. Wells, the curate. He is going away with it to-night, to Avignon, in France, where he is to show it to some people called Long.

‘ Yours,

‘ A SECRET FRIEND.’

It was written in trembling, shaking characters, like the hand of a sick lady.

Now she saw it all, and the direction she was praying for became suddenly revealed. The knowledge of whose handiwork was here discovered, gave her sudden strength. She kindled with anger and defiance. She now knew it was a base, vile plot. She felt a sudden strength imparted to her weak frame.

She had her whole plan mapped out in a few seconds. Action—quick, firm, and determined—was necessary. Everything depended on destroying this rumour and its evidences before it had time to spread.

It was now past seven o'clock. She called in her sisters. There was no use entering into elaborate explanations with them—and they were not too curious.

Something had happened—nothing to alarm them—which rendered it necessary for her to go away for a short time only.

‘Go away!’ they said in astonishment. ‘Where—when—for how long?’

‘There!’ said Charlotte, with a smile, ‘I knew you would be frightened. What is there in a little trip into the country for two or three days?’

‘But you are so ill!’ both said together ‘so weak—so delicate.’

‘It will do me good,’ said Charlotte, still smiling. (She was obliged to sink on the sofa at that moment.) ‘Change of air! Why, it is the very thing!’

‘But where *are* you going, dear Charlotte?’ they said again. ‘Tell us. Oh, it is very wrong of you. You are not fit. You——’

‘Hush! hush!’ said Charlotte, ‘only a day or two. I will write every day. Now help me to get my things together. Stay, dears, one moment. *Not a word to any one, of my being away.* You know not how much depends on this. Promise me.’

They did promise with wonder and a sense of mystery. In twenty minutes she was ready—in five more she was in a cab, speeding away to London Bridge.

CHAPTER XV.

A JOURNEY.

AT London Bridge were many gathered, converging from many quarters of London; a stream, a turgid, swollen stream of brawling men and women, barrows of luggage, trundling porters, children, cloaks, capes, umbrellas in bundles, like faggots—all pouring in through the entrance, as through a burst sluice. There were Paris men, hurrying back to Paris, and London men, hurrying from London; for India, military men, now at their very last day's leave, and who have to count the seconds to save distance; brides and bridegrooms, tourists, fathers of families, with all their household regiments, and the baggage and ammunition of their household regiments—in short, the whole

motley, polyglot, parti-coloured cosmopolitan assemblage—the true citizens of the world, who are to be encountered every night at that wonderful station.

Yet the weakest and most fragile of all was the veiled lady, in mourning, who was scarcely able to totter from her cab, and had but three minutes to spare to save the train.

Ill and weak as she was, she took a hasty glance down the long series of well-lighted blue cabins which, with doors open, stretched down the platform. They were all full, rank after rank, row after row, of tenants—some reading, some patient, and in attitude of expectancy—all duly draped, and made taut, compact and comfortable. There was a ten hours' night before them—a night of swooping through many counties, leaving a trail of sparks behind, like a locomotive comet. Still, swiftly as she was hurried down the platform by a bearded conductor, who affected a foreign air, she was able to mark a face she knew peeping from a blue cabin, Number 90. The oil lamp above sent down a dull yellow glare upon him, and re-

vealed the Reverend Charlton Wells. But the Reverend Charlton Wells knew not who was the veiled lady in mourning that looked in so curiously, down through the night.

The Paris express went on its way. The series of bright blue chambers swooped down towards the sea, like a swift bird. The land cabin passengers sat within, muffled, and read, and talked, and nodded drowsily. A clergyman, in Number 90, with a little hand-bag on his knee, did not—he was too excited. He was laying out pictures of his future life—of a nuptial crown, blessings, favours, and exquisite bliss. He chafed against the delay, and thought the great bird upon whose back he was borne moved its wings too slowly. In a blue chamber lower down, the muffled lady carried on a stronger contest, but a victorious struggle, over weakness, sickness, and an unutterable anxiety—yet, over all three, by the force of will, she triumphed. This she was determined would carry her through. A soothing comfort happily came to her aid: the unfamiliar motion—the exer-

tion she had gone through—all made her drowsy, and she had uneasy snatches of sleep, five minutes long each.

Ten, thirty-five—Dover. The great horse has stopped at the edge of the sea, panting, spent, and breathing hard. Muffled passengers stream forth, leave behind the long row of blue chambers, lighted, warm, and comfortable, at which they look back wistfully. Before them is raw discomfort—the indistinct shape of the great ocean, the cold night. Here are the twinkling lights of the little port, the obscure inns with open doors, and half-lit up; and the indistinct dark outline of the sea monster which is waiting alongside. Very clear, however, is the wreath of white steam against the dark air, for the monster is blowing impatiently, like a whale in agonies.

In that rueful procession is the tenant of No. 90, with his hand-bag in his hand, and not very far behind, the muffled lady. All are presently got in, and battened down below. They are presently at sea.

Not a stormy passage—but fresh and breezy

—all stretched below, like Moslems upon their carpets. One, thirty A.M.—Calais—lights passing by at each side, the long wooden arms of Calais piers enclosing them on both hands. Calais Customs, muffled soldiery, standing high up on a wooden framework, which is the pier; Calais porters, and what seems a gigantic hearse waiting ready to carry away the luggage.

Passengers stream out: Calais all asleep, or at most blinking drowsily. French steam-roc ready waiting, with wings furled, and fresh French blue cabins ready waiting, with open doors. Passenger array is all disorganized, scattered here and there, but mainly busy, in a brilliant glass temple, where meats and wines are being had. The late tenant of No. 90 is there, cheerful and talking jocularly to a stout Briton. He has his sack in his hand—and the muffled lady is not far away in the crowd.

There are now military French guards, with waists like ladies, 'circulating' busily, and chanting 'En voiture, Messieurs!' Away flutter 'Messieurs,' with unfinished sandwiches in their hands. The gentleman with the hand-

bag enters voiture Numero Trente, where there is only one passenger, and immediately after him enters the muffled lady, and sits down at the far end. Then the great iron-bird lays its breast to the wind, and begins to swoop through the French country. The cabin passengers drop away gradually into a weary sleep, for by this time they are very tired. But two of the tenants of Numero Trente are wakeful. Four, twenty-five—Amiens. Day beginning to break—greyness in the east. French country begins to open gradually. Drowsy passengers lifting their heads, look about them with a shiver. Seven, twenty—Full daylight—Paris. Place Roubaix, great hall of Northern Railway station—douane—blue-frosted porters, and general disorder. Gentleman with the hand-bag drives away in a cab, and the muffled lady, taking another, bids them drive with all speed to the Boulevard Mazas, the station of the Great Lyons and Mediterranean line.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

EXPRESS at eleven; so there is ample time. She takes stimulant of some kind, does the muffled lady; and, strange to say, feels surprisingly strong, something.

The muffled lady waited, waited patiently the hour there was to wait. The Mazas station is the great threshold of the foreign world, the huge terminus whence all men and women turn their faces to the east and west. There the muffled lady saw natives of every clime and quarter pouring in at the gates as the hours wore on. But there was one whom she waited for anxiously who did not come. It was within twenty minutes. The iron horses were

already harnessed. It now wanted but fifteen minutes,—now ten. All voyagers were bidden to ‘mount.’ The muffled lady looked out wistfully. At last, a light fiacre, without luggage, is seen hurrying up at full speed. He has come *ventre à terre*, says the driver, pressing for an extravagant compensation. Barely in time.

The huge tribes of pilgrims have drifted away out of the huge *salle*, in upon the platform. The mountain of luggage, which had been piled up like rocks upon rocks by the waves, has again been swept away. Every one is settled in the carriages, save a few stragglers,—notably the figure with the hand-bag, who rushes in panting, and who enters a blue chamber, ‘Numero V.,’ where there is no one sitting, and establishes himself in a far corner. Five minutes—Arrives a French lady—enters the same carriage—and an officer, going to his regiment. One minute—and a muffled lady enters quietly, and shrinks into the shadow next the open door. The *militaire* already lays out pleasant pasturage for himself,

and considers the ennui of the journey already far away. Eight, thirty—they are gone.

It is the old routine over again. The pleasant French country, the pleasant French names, which sound in rich, mellow, fruity tones, like the old wines they stand for. A sort of bouquet seems to exhale from them. Montereau, St. Florentin, Tonnerre, Nuits, Dijon, Beaune, and Macon. Buffets here, there, and everywhere in delightful succession. From the windows the pointswomen, in uniform, in broad-leafed shiny hats, with a belt slung across like a cartouche-belt, and a flag in a scabbard at their side, like a sword, are seen to present arms as the train passes by.

At Dijon the militaire departs reluctantly to join his garrison. He has made adroit efforts in the direction of the veiled lady, but without profit. He is more successful with the lady of his own nation.

The day goes by slowly.

It is now night—ten o'clock; and here is the grandest of provincial towns—grand in its

open places, its rivers, bridges, and tall houses—Lyons. Three hundred and sixteen miles.

Half an hour delay, and then go forwards, still flying to the south, to the great Italian sea. In the same cabin are the same passengers,—the English clergyman, with his little hand-bag, the muffled lady, and the French lady. A French commis voyageur gets in later, but passes away in an hour or so at Montelimar.

Midnight. *Train*. An illuminated palace, which is the first buffet. The French lady descends. And the French lady does not return. She lives a few miles out of Tours.

Remain only the muffled lady and the figure with the little hand-bag.

The muffled lady had not reckoned on this. She had looked up from an uneasy doze, and was bewildered. She rubbed her eyes. *Train* again rushing through the night. Now was the moment for action. But the door opens, and, in company with a cold, searching draught, enters the guard, asking for tickets. He is gone in a moment; and then the muffled lady

throws up her veil, and moves over to the other end. The other was sleeping—enjoying delightful dreams. He was fatigued, exhausted, and slept very profoundly. In his hand, and on his knees, was the little hand-bag he had carried so far.

Charlotte stooped down and looked at it closely. She saw that it was secured by but a spring. Very cautiously she leant lightly upon it, and it opened. And inside could be seen the precious packet. Quietly she drew it forth, put it by carefully in her bag, and closed it carefully. Nor must it be fancied that she did this with any air of guilty purloining; for as soon as it was done she leant over, and said, loudly,—

‘Mr. Wells!’

He started. For a moment he was bewildered; then gradually collecting his faculties, he looked at her, and said with a scared voice—

‘Miss Charlotte!’

He was confounded at this appearance. But his first instinct, Charlotte remarked, was to grasp tightly his bag.

‘*You* here, Miss Charlotte? What is the meaning of this?’

‘I have followed *you*,’ said Charlotte, calmly, ‘in the same ship, in the same train.’

‘Followed me,’ said he, dropping his eyes; ‘why should you do that?’

‘To save you,’ said she, ‘from a great disgrace, and to hinder an infamous errand.’

He coloured. ‘These are harsh words,’ he said. ‘I know what my errand is; it is merely a commission with which I have been entrusted—nothing to be ashamed of.’

‘You are reduced low indeed,’ said Charlotte, sadly, ‘to become a slave, a tool in the hands of a cruel woman, and then to be driven by this miserable infatuation, to plot the ruin of a family that never did you any harm.’

He turned pale. ‘You speak in riddles.’

‘Ah,’ said Charlotte, ‘do you venture to say that it is a mere innocent object that is taking you down to Avignon?’ She paused. ‘What have we done to you? Was not my father always good to you? Were we not always——’

‘She never told me what this contains,’ said he, touching the bag, ‘or what it is for.’

‘But you know it. You suspect it. This miserable infatuation has blinded you. It has made you forget decency, gratitude, everything. Dear Mr. Wells, I know you are good and honourable. Renounce this degrading mission while it is time.’

He stopped irresolutely, then shook his head. ‘I dare not. I have promised. I must go on.’

‘It will ruin us, blast my poor father’s memory.’

‘I tell you I dare not,’ he said in much confusion. ‘Oh, Miss Charlotte, I am very wretched—a poor, weak, miserable creature,’ he said, after a pause, ‘but you must pity me. But I—in fact—I could not return to her—I dare not—without doing what I undertook.’

‘And,’ said Charlotte, ‘you will perform so base, so unmanly a part?’

‘No, no, dear Miss Charlotte, you misjudge. She is good, she is noble. She has suffered,

but you must make allowance. I bound myself solemnly—indeed I did.’

‘Then,’ said Charlotte, slowly, ‘this is indeed infatuation. I could not believe you would have fallen so low. But you are scarcely accountable, and should be thankful that you have still friends who have saved you from this last degradation.’

‘Saved me?’ he said, doubtingly.

‘Yes, saved you, and saved us. Your errand is at an end. You will never deliver your packet, and—thank Heaven, that you have been preserved from such a foul disgrace.’

He gave a cry, and hurriedly opened his bag, and saw that his treasure was gone.

‘Robbed!’ he said. ‘Miserable man, what am I to do? *You* could not have done this?’

She did not answer.

‘Ah! it was *you*! Come, come,’ he said, excitedly, ‘it must be given up. This is no child’s play. I am serious, I can tell you, Miss Franklyn. Give me back my papers.’

‘I did not say I had taken it,’ said Charlotte, calmly.

‘It won’t do!’ he went on, with increasing excitement. ‘I swore I would carry out her wishes, and I shall. I undertook it, and shall do what I undertook. Come, Miss Charlotte Franklyn, I am not the old, quiet creature you took me for. No trifling with me, now.’

Indeed, he did not seem like one that was. Never was any one so changed as this simple country curate. There was a fierce, rude manner about him, that seemed to Charlotte to reach almost to ruffianism.

She had gone back to her end of the carriage. He went over to her. There was a truculent menace in his eye.

‘I tell you I have no choice in this matter. I promised her. I am hers. For ever! I would go to the end of the world for her! I don’t care who knows it, but I *do* love and worship her above every one! Oh, Miss Franklyn, forgive me! I know it is a wretched infatuation—it is making me miserable—and I speak to you like a ruffian—but—but—I *must* have that paper!’

Charlotte surveyed him with a look of deep contempt.

'I could not have believed this,' she said—
'*such* a change !'

There was a strange look in his eyes.

'Come,' he said, 'we can have no more of this. Give me back my paper at once. Take care,' he added, getting up. 'I am not to be—'

'Stop,' said Charlotte ; 'you shall be spared the indignity of taking it from me.'

She opened the bag slowly. In an instant he was changed.

'Oh, Miss Franklyn !' he said, falling back and covering up his face in his hands. 'I am a wretch—a monster ! I blush for my own degradation. I am a lost, ruined creature, whom you are too good to speak so kindly to, but——'

Charlotte took out the roll of paper slowly.

'There,' she said.

But in a second she had the window down, and the packet was plunged into the black, murky, roaring ocean of night below. 'Now !' she said.

He gave a wild cry of rage and despair, and rushed to the door. Charlotte long after recollected the look of fury he cast upon her. But it was only for a moment. He had presently flung himself into his corner, and was giving way to passionate exclamations of despair.

‘Oh! oh! How can I go back? how show myself to her? You have ruined me! She will cast me off, for her heart was set on this, and she had promised me to——’

Then he became furious again.

‘What right had you? how dare you? It is open robbery. No matter, the law can reach you. Ah! what made you do it? What harm have I done to you? I shall never raise my head again.’

Suddenly the train began to slacken its speed; it was going to stop. It was barely three or four minutes from the time the packet had been cast forth.

He checked the torrent of his reproaches. He could scarcely trust his senses.

‘It seems like a providence,’ he said. ‘Ah,

you have failed! You did not think of this. My dear Jenny will have her wish yet.'

Charlotte was quite unmoved. She listened to him calmly. They were entering an illuminated temple, lights flashing, and sleepless men standing along. The little telegraphic gong was tinkling merrily—as they are always tinkling in France—and a sickly yellow light played on the clock. Two, forty-five—Orange.

He had 'descended' in a second, and in another was telling his story to the station-master. Valuable papers dropped from the carriage window—Reward. The first portion was listened to with polite abstraction, the second with eager attention. Antoine should get a lantern forthwith, and should walk back with monsieur. Such things often happened; they always found them again.

The up train was due in twenty minutes, and when it arrived the muffled lady took a fresh ticket, and went back towards Paris. At the very first station, however, she got down and went to some rustic railway inn, where she slept very sweetly.

But the Curate and Antoine the porter trudged wearily back with the lantern, and sought for an hour or more. They could find nothing. They did indeed discover a large roll of English newspapers, which some Englishman must have flung out, and at the sight of which Antoine raised a joyful cry of discovery. But the precious packet they could not light on. It was no wonder; for the English newspaper was Charlotte's, and the packet was miles away under a certain pillow in a little rustic railway inn.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME.

JENNY was now alone in her castle in Chesterfield Street, of which she was queen. All that day, it has been mentioned, she was in a marvellous state of excitement. She felt, as it were, at the last moves of a great game of chess—though, indeed, Jenny was likely to find that pastime insipid. She made some rapid play these last few days, and they seemed to promise successfully. She passed from the various chambers in her castle restlessly, and composed herself to steady sitting down, for it was now eight o'clock.

‘He has left London Bridge,’ said Jenny.
‘He is on his road.’

She was pleased with herself for this bold,

dashing stroke, and was almost glad that the difficulties had arisen, which she could surmount so brilliantly.

‘They don’t know Jenny Bell quite, as yet,’ she said. ‘Yet, why could they not leave me in peace? I molest no one. It is their own concern, if they meddle with me.’

Then she thought of Charlotte.

‘She chose to fight for Grey Forest with me! So be it. Let the best man win, as that foolish young Craven used to say.’

In Jenny’s private ledger there was a long row of figures, standing under that gentleman’s name. Jenny felt herself ill-treated by him—insulted, and, what was worse, deceived. She laid out a pleasant plan for the future, when she should have the pleasure, one of these days, of reckoning with him. Not just at present, for she had too many threads in her hand to wind off. But all in good time. She felt, indeed, like a little domestic sort of Napoleon, dealing with subordinate monarchs, all of whom she would deal with in their turn. It was only a question of time.

She passed a pleasant evening castle-building, and even followed her emissary as far as Calais. Then she went to bed, and slept sweetly.

The next day was a day of action, and seemed very long. She wanted news. She wished to hear of something—of somebody; but patience was the only thing. She went out to walk—came in again—went out to walk again. Her envoy was far down the fair land of France by this time. Great issues seemed to hang suspended in the air all round, and she felt their weight upon her breast. The evening drew in—four, five, six, seven—dinner.

It grew dark earlier than usual, for the day had been gusty and stormy; and the skilful Admiral who divines the coming of winds and tempests had been busy telegraphing to all the coast. By dinner-time it had pretty well set in: blasts were sweeping round the corner, windows were beginning to clatter, and stray slates to tumble into the street with a musical jangle. There were all the pronounced symptoms of a rough night.



Jenny noted these, as she tripped in to dinner, and gave a little shiver. She was very thankful. She was not exposed to the fury and discomfort outside, like the poor people whose proper lot it was. There was an excellent fire in the dining-room, and perhaps on the whole she would as soon have the storm continue ; for, by the contrast, her own sense of comfort was wonderfully increased.

As this was a sort of festival time, a little feast was not inappropriate. A light German wine, sparkling, something French from the French *café*, in the next street, and a pigeon. Jenny enjoyed it, but somehow was growing nervous. She soothed herself with agreeable images of dominion. She thought how she would have a conservatory on her stairs, new curtains, and some French furniture—a Louis Quatorze clock. How she would gradually, too, work her way into a certain order of society—not so much the richer cream, but the lively, the witty, and artistic. Men of this stamp she would gather about her—little suppers—she the Récamier—queen of the

society. Every one should talk of the piquant Lady Maxwell. This speculation brought to her mind a person upstairs, who rather stood in the way of those pretty pictures. Jenny sighed. Patience was the only thing.

It came to ten—to eleven. Jenny stirred up the fire, and cast on a log. She always had logs: she thought it so much more cheerful. She determined when Grey Forest was being properly refitted, she would have handsome mediæval ‘dogs,’ for the better burning of wood.

That led her on into the most delightful of speculations. It was a very capable mansion, and offered opportunities for the most picturesque decoration. She thought how pleasant it would be to put it altogether in the hands of Brackets, the great Birmingham mediævalist, who would hang up his coronas, and put in armorial shields in the windows. Jenny had the greatest taste for this sort of thing, and had actually, for her own private amusement, purchased all the colours and models for the pleasant pastime of Illumination; though it

must be said, she was not skilful at the work. Grey Forest had great capacities. It might be laid out in terraces,—little bit of ornamental water—fêtes—ah, yes—the very thing! Something new for these old-fashioned fogies of the country. Lady Maxwell's Fête!—what music in the words!

Then she thought of Charlotte. 'Poor little Jenny!' said poor little Jenny to herself, in a sort of tranquil admiration, 'you are very, very clever—you are a match for all these good and noble people. No money, no friends, no help, and yet little Jenny has done all this for herself. She has fought her battle with men and women, and has beaten.'

Her round eyes kindled; she gave a start, for the wind came bursting violently round the chimney, like the fall of a heap of stones—it woke her from her reverie. She went over to a little drawer, and took out one of her 'Letts' Diaries,' an old one. She had to search for it.

'It is a long time ago now, but it is a wonderful deal to have done in the time. I can scarcely believe it. The whole tribe of them

pulled down — *she* — all of them — on the ground!’ Jenny turned back the pages, until she came to one on which her eyes rested tranquilly. ‘That little cross,’ she said; ‘I may almost take it out, now, or write “paid” opposite—like a bill.’ The humour of the notion pleased her, and she actually wrote ‘paid’ opposite this entry, whatever it was. ‘A long time ago,’ said Jenny, shaking it to and fro so as to dry it—‘a very long time. And yet I have had wonderful patience—suffered too,’ added Jenny, pensively; ‘suffered a good deal. And yet I feel no bitterness—none in the world. I can afford,’ said Jenny, with a pleasant laugh, ‘to be indulgent. Why not? Everything is coming out exactly as I wished it to come out. I think that pauper creature has often repented the hour she interfered—and thought she interfered so cleverly—with poor, helpless little Jenny.’

It was twelve o’clock. She heard the chime of a fashionable chapel close by, giving out that hour. But the notes came to her through a terrible hurley-burley of boisterous storm,

and tumbling slates, and clatter on the windows, as though some one were lashing them with awful whips. It was a wild night. The meteorological Admiral had forecasted rightly. The black 'Drums' were up at every port, and the next day, the leading journal had a dismal series of reports, headed 'Deal,' 'Holyhead,' 'Dover,' all chronicling a dismal story of ravages and wrecks. Jenny thought of her messenger. 'Poor Wells!' she said, with a smile; 'this will be in waiting for him when he returns.' But it was not so much matter now. For his work must have been done by this time, and done successfully.

She thought of the packet of M. Bernardi's novels, the string of which had not yet been cut. She opened them abstractedly. The old story, 'La Femme du Diable,' 'Le Mariage et la Mort!' 'Aspasie,' 'Les Amours de la Comtesse d' * * * ,' and the rest. The banquet was more than usually piquant, and yet Jenny was not hungry. The meats lay there untasted. It came to half-past twelve.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JENNY'S LAST BATTLE.

JENNY now thought she would go to bed. She lit the candle tranquilly, and went upstairs. She thought of the sick lady, as she came near to her own door, and counted her among the enemies who were banded against her. Jenny thought how she would reckon with all, in the fulness of time. She felt her strength and passed on.

The wakeful lady heard every step. The door opened softly, a few inches wide. The long wasted face peered out curiously.

‘Well, Jacky,’ she said, in a whisper—her eyes were growing dim latterly—‘Jacky dear, what was she doing?’

So the miserable cub was below stairs,

spying on her again—listening—watching! Jenny now, long outraged, blazed into a fury. She went boldly to meet her enemy.

‘Oh, ho!’ said the lady. ‘Miss Bell, is it? What have you come from doing now?’

‘Ask your son, your precious,’ said Jenny, halting before her. ‘Nice offices you set him to! You bring him up nicely! But I tell you, ma’am, I won’t put up with it. When the master of this house comes back——’

The wife of the master of the house burst into a loud fit of laughter. ‘Oh, listen to her. How grand! What a deal of power you have here, to be sure! Take care, my good girl.’

The sneering way of this woman latterly, always made Jenny’s blood boil. Latterly, too, she had begun to think her dangerous, and not to be despised.

‘What do you mean?’ said Jenny. ‘Do you think I mind your threats?’

Again the other laughed.

‘You feel quite secure. Of course you do. You know everything that is going on. Of course you do!’

‘I do,’ said Jenny, ‘and shall match you all yet.’

Again the other laughed.

‘Of course you think *he* is on your side. You know what he is gone away for. Of course! And he will come back and take the governess’s side. Of course. But I can tell you, my good girl, *your day is over*. He shall know *you* by and by.’

Jenny trembled all over with rage. But with the rage was a sort of terror. She always thought this creature was dangerous.

‘What fine threats! This is all false,’ she said—‘false every way.’

‘Is it?’ said the other, with something like a shriek—‘is it? I know what you think. You have planned it all! I am a weak, ailing creature—dying every day. Half out of my senses, too. I know your game. But I am strong—strong enough to match you. I tell you I have watched you all along, and know everything you have been about.’

Jenny was beside herself with fury. The lamp she held in her hand showed the lines of

her round face, working in a sort of contortion. She had strong passions, had Jenny. She would hardly trust herself to speak. So she walked straight from the landing into the room, and confronted her enemy there.

‘Infamous creature,’ she said, ‘I tell you these are calumnies—false, every one of them.’

‘They are true,’ said the other, fiercely. ‘Who was it stole the deeds, this very day? Ah! you see! Who was it sent away that wretched tool of yours over to France? You see we know everything! The despised sick woman! Who was it used to steal out into the park and meet gentlemen? Who wrote gentlemen letters, ridiculing their master—the master of this house—whom they were cringing and flattering the next moment? Oh, we know all about you. The game is up, my lady, you have been very sly, but there have been others as sly. Your hand is spoiled, my fine young lady. All your little arts and tricks have been seen. And the poor creatures that have been thought so stupid, all along—one sick, another a child—they have

been able to match this very clever lady. It is capital! Look here,' she said, with a glance of fierce triumph, taking something from under her pillow. 'Look here—you know *this!*' and she waved a strange mosaic-looking letter, all patched, and pieced, and pasted across—indeed no other than Jenny's own note to Mr. Craven, rescued from the basket, its shreds carefully, and with infinite pains, put together. The note, alas! in which she had spoken so unguardedly of her patron—Sir Frederick.

'Ah, my lady!' the other went on, furiously, 'we have you trapped now, *and as sure as Sir Frederick Maxwell comes back to-morrow, he shall have this in his hand, and a whole journal of your doings day by day—* Oh!'

She caught her side with a sudden start.

'Oh, this heart,' she gasped. 'Never mind,' she added, 'I can bear it. I shall live *to see you ejected* yet, my fine Miss Bell.'

Jenny's lips moved, but she could not speak. She was confounded, overwhelmed, and seemingly scared. The sick lady revelled insolently in her triumph.

Jenny then turned away, and looking at her with a sort of terror, left the room, slowly. She descended the stairs as slowly, and seemed almost stunned. At the first landing she stopped, and remained, with her eyes fixed steadily on her lamp.

As she stood there, she might, indeed, have felt that all her castles were tumbling down in ruins about her. The game did, indeed, seem 'up,' and Captain Jenny's army was getting into a rout.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEFEAT !

SHE went back to the dining-room slowly. The storm was still raging. Rain and wind beat furiously against the great window on the landing. Jenny fell into her chair quite scared. She was terrified—confounded. Here was failure at hand, in that very council chamber, where only a few moments before all was success. Worse than that, not only failure but exposure.

* * * * *

For a quarter of an hour she sat there with her eyes on the glowing logs. Failure, certain failure it was ; and a certain exposure she could not get beyond. There had been a plot—a hideous, unmanly plot—in which all had been concerned—the wretched boy—the wretched

woman—(Jenny stamped her foot furiously)—and that—yes—*she*—that hateful Charlotte, too—*she* was at the bottom of it all. And was *she* to win at the end ?

* * * * *

Suddenly she recovered herself. A strange light flashed in her eyes. She lifted her head. She hurried upstairs swiftly.

The windows on the landing clattered accompaniment as she passed.

She entered her enemy's room again.

The sick woman was lying down—panting, exhausted, and the smile of victory was on her lips. A dull lamp was upon the drawers. Jenny measured her, and drew her lips into the coldest and bitterest shape.

‘Come back again!’ said the sick lady. ‘What do you want here? What! not heard enough?’

‘They are false,’ said Jenny, speaking with a deliberate slowness, and keeping her eyes fixed steadily upon her. ‘False, infamously false—everything you have said; and you, and those who are working with you, know it to be false.’

The other glared at her. 'Ah! wait until to-morrow,' she said, 'and you will see!'

'Aye, so we shall!' said Jenny, in the same tone. 'You have told me what you have been doing to ruin me.'

'Ah, exactly,' said the other, eagerly.

'Well and good. But,' said Jenny, 'do you suppose I have been idle? Do you suppose *I* have worked for nothing, or have been scribbling away whole nights long for nothing—for the pure love of law? Ah! my good lady; do you follow me?'

The sick lady said nothing. She began to breathe a little.

'Those long nights,' continued Jenny, with the same cold eyes still upon her, 'in your husband's study—how were they spent, do you suppose? Do you imagine I have not been putting my labour out to interest? Do you fancy I have not made myself secure? Am I like a mere drudge? What do you say, my good lady?'

The other raised herself upon her elbow, and began to look at Jenny much in the same wild

astonished way that Jenny had done at her. But she was pressing her hand tightly to her side, which Jenny had not done.

‘Do you suppose I am a sort of fool? I tell you,’ said Jenny, drawing a step nearer, and speaking the words as though she was discharging a series of arrows, ‘I am not to be *stirred*. I laugh at your poor, feeble, little spy system. I am safe, secure—*immovable, whether you live or die.*’

The wretched lady, now sitting quite up, and gasping terribly, was trying to speak. But Jenny—

‘They have deceived you. Poor miserable imprisoned woman, what could *you* expect to do? My security is in the folly of weak man. He is my slave. Do your worst,’ said Jenny, drawing nearer, and putting her face quite close, and stabbing her with her words; ‘Sir Frederick knows *me*, and *I tell you,*’ said Jenny, bending close down to her and tipping what she spoke with a cold venom, ‘*we can bide our time!*’

The other started into the air with a shriek

and a sudden spasm. She sank back and rose again with shriek after shriek. She rolled and grovelled on her pillow in agonies.

Jenny rang the bell and went to the door. 'On her own head be it. It is her own work.'

'*Now*,' she said, as she opened the door, 'I may be the queen of Grey Forest yet.'

Standing there was Sir Frederick Maxwell and his little son. Jenny's heart sank, for there was a stern purpose in his face, which showed that he knew all.

'Wretched girl,' he said, hurrying past, 'what have you been doing?'

The unhappy Lady Maxwell was still writhing and shrieking in terrible agonies. It was as though some one were stabbing her and stabbing her again; for she seemed to be striving to catch at the spectral sword that was entering her side. Winged messengers went off to the east and to the west for doctors, and presently came a plunging of horses; and the great physician, disturbed at a fashionable feast, came hurrying in. Later, too, another

great physician came, with reeking horses, sprang from his carriage, bounded upstairs, and met his brother. They gave some weak lenitives. The wretched lady was still being stabbed. But even while they stood there the sword was driven in, as it were, up to the hilt ; and with a gasp, and a shriek of agony, the soul of Lady Maxwell passed away.

That was about two o'clock in the morning. No one in the house took rest that night. Miss Bell had not witnessed the last agonies of the lady of the house, but kept within her room. She, too, did not sleep, nor indeed go to bed. But early, when the morning was breaking, a servant came to tell her softly that she was wanted in the parlour. He found her cold, shrinking in a corner, scared and frightened. Sir Frederick wished to see her in the parlour.

The morning was gloomy and miserable. The wax-candles on Sir Frederick Maxwell's desk, by which he read his briefs, were lighted. He sat there like a judge.

'I know all,' he said, 'and suspect more. Knowing so much as I did, I was guilty myself

in leaving this house. I should not have been away half an hour. Heaven forgive you !

He paused a moment, then added, 'and forgive me too.'

Jenny was settling rapidly in an attitude of piteous grace and entreaty. Yet she was not the old Jenny. 'Sir ——' she said in a mournful cadence, exquisitely touching.

'Sir——' said Jenny.

'Hush ! hush !' he said, waving his hand impatiently. 'It is useless trying more of this imposture. It is profanation to the dead. You must leave this house within an hour. You are a terrible creature. I don't know how to speak to you—but go !'

Jenny bowed her head, and retired without a word. She silently went to her room, and in half an hour had got her things together. In the grey of the morning a cab was brought to the door, and she was driven away from the house of death out into the world.

It was hard upon that poor outcast. She had fought courageously, and should have won. Still she is young, and has the world before her.

A month will help her over this repulse, and put her in heart for fresh battle.

It is easy to speculate how it is to fare with the other characters in this little play. Charlotte and her young Craven, stately 'coming round,' as it is called, within a few months; and Cousin John Hall, the *Deus ex machina*, or rescuer, watching the settlements. Franklyns' home again at Grey Forest, beautified and full of glory. Bells ring out, and villagers harness themselves to the coach of this blissful pair.

There were but two with whom it has fared ill. The rejected Curate, now on the verge of starvation, skulking about; and poor, luckless Jenny Bell, who has been plunged into the dark, surging, London waters. This was but a passage from her youthful life. She has the will for many more adventures. But she is sure to emerge later—on the surface too—with the same old spirit, and *a memory* keen as ever.

THE END.

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